

One of the experts in the law answered him, “Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also.”

⁴⁶ Jesus replied, “And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.

⁴⁷ “Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your forefathers who killed them. ⁴⁸ So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. ⁴⁹ Because of this, God in his wisdom said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.’ ⁵⁰ Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.

⁵² “Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.” (NIV84)

Theme: Wait for Wisdom

1. He is the Key to understanding the Bible
2. He is the Key that opens heaven.

Today, the fourth stanza of our hymn, we called Jesus, “the Key of Knowledge.” You can page through your NIV Bible all you want, but you won’t find that name for Christ anywhere. However, we get this name from the last verse of our text. Some translations like the NIV translate it as “Key to knowledge,” others like the HCSB and the ESV have it as “Key of Knowledge.” A key opens that which was previously closed. A key could also be the missing part to understanding something. Christ is both. The key of knowledge is the gospel. And since the gospel is about Christ and belongs to Christ, we can say that Christ is the Key of Knowledge.

In 1 Corinthians Paul refers to Jesus as, **the Wisdom of God**. True wisdom is knowing and believing in Christ. So as we finish up this advent season and this midweek series we wait for Wisdom. For he is the key to understanding the Bible and he is the key that opens heaven.

Before our text for today begins Jesus was attacking the Pharisees. He pronounced three “woes” upon them—essentially condemning them and their actions. He attacked their hypocrisy. They pretended to be good on the outside, but inwardly they were disgusting sinners. He also condemned them for their work righteousness. They focused so much on God’s laws, and their own laws, that they missed the gospel completely.

This didn’t sit well with some companions of the Pharisees—the experts in the law. They were the Biblical scholars of the day, responsible for teaching God’s Word to the people. One complained to Christ. **Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also.** In response Jesus also proclaimed three “woes” on the so-called “experts” in the law. The main thing the experts in the law did: they over-emphasized the law while hiding the gospel. **And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.** The experts in the law forced the people to follow God’s laws. On top of this they made the people follow their own man-made laws. These laws placed a heavy burden on the people as they strived to follow them. And the experts in the law let the weight of their sins crush the spirits and souls of their people. When you boil it all down, the so called “experts” in the law, or the Old Testament, didn’t understand it. They missed the point of the Old Testament. They didn’t talk about the gospel. They didn’t point the people to the Savior who would come and remove the guilt of all their sins. They emphasized the law and forgot about forgiveness. They essentially killed and buried the teachings of the Old Testament prophets. **Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your forefathers who killed them.** Jesus would go on to say that they were guilty of shedding the blood of all of God’s prophets who were killed in the Old Testament—even though they lived hundreds and thousands years before they lived. The people who killed the prophets killed them because they didn’t like their message. The experts in the law also didn’t like the message of the prophets. They got rid of the gospel. So they figuratively killed the prophets by burying their message.

The experts in the law failed to see the true message of the Old Testament. Do you? What is your view on the Old Testament? What is the main message? We may be tempted to think of the Old Testament is just a bunch of laws for us to follow. We read it and we shutter. We focus on the 10 commandments. But we are also aware of all the other commands God demands of us. We see the Old Testament as a book of morals. It's a book that demands we obey it and makes us feel horrible if we don't.

And one of two things can then result. The first is that we think we do a pretty good job. We believe that we have kept the commands of God. You haven't murdered anyone, or slept with someone outside of marriage. You might mess up every now and again. But over all, you are a pretty good person. You think like the experts in the law. Or, you may fall on the other side of things. You fall into despair. You are like the people under the experts in the law. You see the law and your life, and you become weighed down by their weight. And you simply wait for God to condemn you for your sins.

It's easy to miss the key. And without the key to knowledge we can't understand the Old Testament. But he is there throughout the pages of Scripture—both Old and New Testaments. We see him right after the fall into sin. God promised to send a descendent of Adam and Eve who would save them as he crushed Satan's head. He is there in the promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through him. The prophets loved to tell about him. We are told that he would be born in Bethlehem, of a virgin. He would work around the Sea of Galilee. He would be betrayed, suffer, die, and rise again. The last three Wednesdays we have read some prophesies from Isaiah. There we see Jesus the root of Jesse—an eternal king from David's line. We saw him as the light of dawn who sheds the light of the gospel on the sin-darkened world. Today we see him as the key to the house of David—no one enters God's kingdom without faith in him.

He is the center of all of Scripture. Jesus said so in John 5. **These are the Scriptures that testify about me.** The Old Testament is filled with a bunch of laws. But the purpose of those laws was not only to point out our sins, but to make us realize that we need a Savior. The whole purpose of the law is to point us to Christ. It is to make us realize that we can't save ourselves and without a Savior we will die eternally. And then the gospel, which is found in both the Old

Testament and the New Testament, lifts us up. Yes, even the Old Testament is filled with messages of forgiveness through the Messiah.

Without Christ we cannot understand the Bible. With him we have true wisdom. He truly is the key of knowledge. And he is the key that opens eternal life.

Killing the prophets by killing their message was bad enough. But that wasn't the worst sins the experts in the law were guilty of. If they rejected the gospel of the prophets, they also rejected the who the gospel is all about. They rejected Christ. They didn't believe that he was the promised Messiah. Like they did with the prophets of old, they tried to figuratively kill Jesus by killing his gospel message—but they didn't succeed. But they did succeed in literally killing Christ. For they convinced Pilate to send him to the cross. They killed the ultimate prophet. Until he rose from the dead.

Jesus said in verse 52, **Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.** Not only did the experts in the law reject and kill the key of knowledge, they also tried to hinder others from gaining true wisdom. They tried to stop people from hearing the gospel of Christ. And those who believed in him, those who wanted to follow him, they tried to stop. They spread their lies in order to lead people away from him.

May we never be like the experts in the law by hindering others from hearing the gospel of Christ. Yet at times, we may do just that. The experts in the law were the spiritual leaders of many people. You are the spiritual leaders of your children. And at times your actions might have kept your children away from the gospel of Christ. You may have hidden the key of knowledge from those entrusted to your care. Every time you are too busy to say their prayers with them, to read a devotion with them, bring them to Sunday School, sit with them in the pew and worship, take the opportunities that God gives us in life to teach them the truth of God's Word, you keep someone from Christ. You may do the same through your words and actions. People know you are Christian. And they watch you—how you act and what you say. What do you say to those who ask about your faith? What do you say to those who mock you because of your faith? Do you actions

give a good confession? Are unbelievers turned away from the gospel when they see the way you live your life? Unknowingly we may hinder those from the key of knowledge.

So we pray that we may not hinder anyone from the key of heaven. For that is exactly what Jesus is. He opens heaven for us. He does this through his perfect life. When he died on the cross he credited us with his perfect life. He gave us what we needed to have. And he took away what we couldn't have. For he took away the guilt of all our sins. And he suffered through the pain and agony of hell when he was forsaken by his heavenly Father. Then he rose from the dead. And he promises us that because he rose from the dead, we will too. In the order of service "Morning Praise," found on page 45 in our hymnal, we sing the *Te Deum*. This song has been around for over 1500 years. In it we sing about Christ, "He opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers." It is through faith that we receive all the blessings Christ won for us. Christ gives us the free gift of eternal life. This is something we can't gain on our own. We can't get there by following the law. The law condemns us, but Christ saves. Those that know and believe this have true wisdom. For they have the key of knowledge and eternal life.

Jesus is truly the wisdom of God. So as we wait for the Lord, wait for that Wisdom. For he not only unlocks the true meaning of the Bible, but he also unlocks the doors of heaven. Amen.