

Who Does Jesus Say He Is?

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Date: 28 April 2019

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[0:00] Amen. So, Revelation is often regarded as one of the more difficult books of the Bible to interpret.

I run into that with some regularity because it is a book I really love to preach on. Now, if you're familiar with it, it's not hard to understand why it's thought of as difficult.

There's plenty of symbolism, there's lots of prophecies, the timeline can be a bit tricky to follow. That's tricky enough, but it doesn't help that much of what has been written about it is sensational stuff that actually makes it harder to see what's going on in the themes of the book.

So, as an introduction, I will simply say this. Here is the best principle I can give you for interpreting the book of Revelation.

It probably seems ridiculously simple, but here it goes. Revelation, like all of Scripture, is about Jesus Christ. This book was written to a church that was suffering persecution and spiritual warfare to remind them and to remind us too that Jesus is completely victorious over sin and death and the devil and that his victory is final and absolute.

[2:02] I don't know about you, but that is a reminder that I need. A reminder not to give up, not to be discouraged, not to turn back from serving the Lord, because Jesus Christ has conquered.

Given that Christians were targeted and killed in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday this year for doing what we are doing right now, the theme and message of Revelation is extremely relevant to the world that we are living in.

It's also extremely relevant to anyone who has suffered or anyone who is likely to die one day. I don't think I need to ask for a show of hands to find out who among us feels that this might apply to them.

I do have to give a bit of an apology because we read the entirety of the first chapter of Revelation this morning.

I'm not going to preach on all or even most of it. If I were to preach on everything that we just read, I would not be surprised if it were a sermon series that lasted until this time next year.

[3:20] But as I was praying at the beginning of my preparation for this week's sermon, the couple of verses I just quoted at the beginning really jumped out at me.

And I think that what we find there is so rich, so glorious, that we need to spend some serious time with these verses. So verses 17 and 18 in Revelation chapter 1 will be the focus of this morning's sermon.

Of course, we know in the Gospels, Jesus asks His disciples who they say He is. Our question for this morning is this. Who does Jesus say that He is?

And what does that mean for us? So a little bit of context about Revelation. John the author is writing from exile on the Isle of Patmos and in the Spirit.

He is given a vision of Christ and he is told to write. And the couple of verses I want us to focus on this morning pick up where John sees a vision of Christ.

[4:32] So let's begin by reading verse 17 and we will break it down bit by bit. We read, We might be wondering why John fell at his feet.

There is some debate on the question of whether or not the John who wrote Revelation is the Apostle John. I'm inclined to think so, but then the question arises, Why would the disciple whom Jesus loved fall as though dead at the vision of him?

I think the most obvious answer to that question is that visions of God's glory have a tendency to inspire holy terror. If we look at the examples we have in Scripture.

If we only think of Jesus as meek and mild, we are missing part of the picture. Jesus is holy and he is glorious, and the vision of him and his glory would rightfully inspire holy fear.

In these couple of verses we see the power and majesty of Jesus, which does tell us something about who he is.

[5 : 44] But that's not all that we see. Let's think about what we see next. We read, He laid his right hand on me saying, Fear not, I am the first and the last. He lays his hand on John and tells him not to fear.

The same Jesus who is breathtaking in his holiness is tender and merciful to those who trust in him. And he says this, John, don't be afraid.

And then he says something really interesting. I am the first and the last. If that brings to mind the Old Testament example of God giving his name as I am, that is good because it is supposed to. Jesus is in effect telling John, Don't be afraid, you know me. I am your Lord and your God. And then we must stop and consider a little more about what it means when Jesus says that he is the first and the last, or when he says that he is the Alpha and the Omega.

And I'm reminded of what Paul says about Jesus in Colossians. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.

[7 : 18] If Jesus intends to encourage frustrated or discouraged or fearful believers, and I think it's pretty clear that he does, this point is of incredible worth because it gives a reminder of what the Christian outline of history looks like.

how it began, how it began, and how it will end. It began with all things being created by or through Christ.

It will end with Christ reigning victoriously, having defeated all of his enemies, even death. And at the very center of it all, we see the cross and we see the empty tomb of Jesus Christ.

That means when we look at history, how things used to be, whether good or bad, or we think about our hopes or our fears for the future, when we are worried or we are afraid about the details of our lives, or even about the future of the world, if we're looking at this, you know, from a larger scope, whatever it is, knowing Jesus as the first and the last means that we do not need to be afraid of any of it.

History began with Christ. It will end with Christ. And then the Bible tells us we will dwell with him and reign with him forever and ever. He is the first and the last.

[8 : 49] That puts things in perspective, doesn't it? History is in the hands of our Savior. That should cause us not to be afraid when we think about the future.

I love how the Jerusalem Declaration, one of the documents that sets out what we as Orthodox Anglicans believe, like how it puts it. We think about the future.

We rejoice at the prospect of Jesus' coming again in glory, and while we await this final event of history, we praise him for the way he builds up his church through his spirit by miraculously changing lives.

We rejoice and we praise him because he is the first and the last and he is the same yesterday, today, and forever. That's not all that Jesus says about himself here, so we have some more ground to cover.

Jesus says in verse 18 that he is the living one. He says, I died and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades.

[10 : 07] My brothers and my sisters, Easter is a reminder that Jesus is alive. He is the living one.

And to know him as eternal life. He died. That's a striking thing to consider, isn't it? The one we call our Lord and our God died.

That is a shocking thing that we believe. But as I talked about in another sermon recently, that means that if we know Jesus, we know that we have a Lord who knows what it is like to suffer.

He knows what it's like to face loss. He even knows what it's like to die. He has been there. And he promises us that we are never alone.

Even if we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, as the psalmist writes, he is with us quite literally because he went into the grave to rescue us from death.

[11 : 19] He is with us, even to the grave. And not only did Jesus die, but it gets even more incredible.

He is alive forevermore. He is risen. He is highly exalted. And he will never die again. So can I just say right now, Christ is risen.

I don't get tired of saying that. So Jesus is the first and he is the last. He is the living one. He died.

He is alive forevermore. What does that mean for you and for me? I think we see a clear answer when we look at the last thing I want us to consider this morning, the last part of the verse I want us to consider.

Jesus says, I have the keys of death and Hades. Wow. Let that sink in for a minute.

[12 : 33] That is seriously amazing. Jesus tells us that he has the keys of death and Hades. Which means that Jesus, the risen Lord, has authority over death.

That means that Jesus has authority over the grave. And for those who are facing death or to those who have sinned and are appointed to die because of it, because of it, and that includes all of us, by the way, this is news that is wonderful beyond all measure.

Because what it means is this. If Jesus has the keys, Jesus can set us free from death. Jesus can set us free from Hades. Jesus can set us free from the grave because all authority has been given to our risen Lord Jesus Christ.

At this point, we might be saying, okay, that sounds great. How can I be set free from death? And the answer is so completely simple. Ask Jesus to set you free from death and He will set you free from death.

The one who holds the keys of death and Hades sets free anyone who asks Him to set them free. Isn't that awesome?

[13 : 59] If we ask God to forgive our sins through the death of Christ on the cross for us and to bring us to eternal life through the risen Lord, He does.

Period. Isn't that amazing? Since we're in Revelation anyway, I may as well quote from the last chapter of the book where we read, let the one who is thirsty come, but the one who desires take the water of life without price.

Jesus sets us free from death. Jesus sets us free from Hades. Jesus gives us eternal life and it is given freely to all who come to Jesus.

For you and for me, the question of whether or not we know the one who has the keys of death is the most important question we will ever face.

Because the honest truth is this. If we do not know Jesus as Lord and Savior, if we have not received the forgiveness that is found in Him, we will die in our sins and we will be in captivity forever.

[15 : 19] But if we do know Jesus, if we receive the forgiveness that He gives to all who come to Him, death will have absolutely no authority and no power over us because we belong to the one who defeated it.

We may go into the grave. Yeah, that's how I feel about it too. We may go into the grave, but make no mistake, Jesus will raise us back up.

As I was preparing for this sermon, I couldn't help but be reminded of what St. Athanasius wrote in the fourth century, doing a little light reading. Before you wonder why your pastor is quoting some old dead guy again, I just want to say this is still true today.

Athanasius says, In ancient times before the divine sojourn of the Savior took place, even to the saints, death was terrible. All wept for the dead as though they perished.

But now that the Savior has raised His body, death is no longer terrible. For all who believe in Christ trample on it as if it were nothing and choose rather to die than deny their faith in Christ.

[16 : 53] And plenty have had to make that choice and have. Whether or not death is terrible comes down to the question of whether or not we belong to Jesus, the one who has the keys.

And so I have to say, I'm not sure that we do, but if we have anyone here this morning or who may be listening to this recording later who has not put their trust in Christ, please do not let this morning pass you by without doing so.

Nothing in this life is certain. Any of us could face death at any moment. Please do not die without knowing Jesus. Knowing Jesus is the greatest joy that any of us could ever find.

He is the first and the last. He is the beginning and the end. He is the living one. He died, and not only that, He is alive forevermore.

He has the keys of death and Hades. That's who Jesus says He is, and I assure you, Jesus is who He says that He is.

[18 : 12] Praise His holy name. So I close with this. To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom, priest to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever.

Amen. Amen.