

Behold The Living Jesus Christ

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[0:00] Our passage for today is Revelation chapter 1 verses 17 and 18. We believe that the whole Bible is given by God's inspiration, breathed out by the Holy Spirit of God.

But he did this using men, using these scribes who were eyewitnesses and who were prophets and were writing down what God has done, what God has enacted in human history.

And he's preserved it by his power in the Bible, in his holy word. Jeremiah read for us the account of how the disciples gathered around the cross and Jesus promised to meet them.

One of the disciples that was very close to Jesus was John. And by this point in the first century church, John is most likely the only disciple still alive.

Tradition has it that John had been tortured though. He had been put in a vat of boiling oil so he would have been physically deformed and he was exiled to an island called Patmos all alone.

[1:04] And here we are joined by brothers and sisters in the family of God sharing in our faith together. And he had the worst type of torture perhaps on this island which was solitary confinement away from the church all alone.

And the Lord ministered to this disciple John. He gave them a vision. He brought them spiritually, brought John spiritually into heaven, into the presence of Jesus Christ.

And this is what he writes down for us in Revelation chapter 1 verses 17 and 18. When I saw him, this is Jesus Christ risen from the dead in glory with God.

John says, Amen.

And I have the keys of Hades and of death. The word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. Please be seated.

[2:21] Oh Lord, please speak to everyone that you've brought here, Lord. By your power, for your glory. Please turn our eyes upon Jesus. That the things of earth may grow strangely dim.

In the light of his glory. In grace we ask for the sake of Jesus, Lord. For the sake of your name. And for his work that he accomplished. Amen.

Well brothers and sisters and dear friends. A very simple invitation for you today. For each of us.

And it's this. Behold the living Jesus Christ.

Behold the living Jesus Christ. That word behold. It's an older word in English. But it's used 1,326 times in all of the Bible.

An example is John 1 29. John the Baptist preaches behold Jesus Christ. The Lamb of God. Who takes away sin.

[3:31] To behold. To behold. To behold. According to Noah Webster's dictionary of 1828. It's to lock the eyes upon something. To see with attention.

To observe with care. To put all that you have in attending to a thing. To direct and to fix your mind on a subject. To behold.

I call you to behold the living Jesus Christ with all of Scripture. But we do this not by sight physically, but by faith. Faith is to know something is true, even though you can't see it.

And in this way, by the power of the Spirit, let's pray together that God will cause us to behold the living Jesus Christ, to gaze at Him, to ponder Him, to contemplate Him.

In an undistracted meditation, I'll invite you to behold Jesus Christ in four ways today. And as we behold Jesus, we behold the glory of God as He's revealed it to us.

[4:37] The first way I invite you to behold with eyes of faith today, Jesus Christ is in His love. Behold the love of God to us in Jesus Christ, to you who will receive it.

Did you notice in Revelation 11:7, John says, When I saw, when I beheld Jesus, Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, who took upon Himself our nature with all that makes us human and all of our common infirmities.

Yet He did this without sin. This is who John beheld. It's the same man that He walked with on earth. Him, Jesus Christ, now in glory, the King of kings in heaven.

The same Jesus, as we read, who wore a crown of thorns for sinners. Him, Jesus Christ, the Word of God, that breathed this world into existence, the Creator of all, who then became for sinners a man of sorrows, mocked, humiliated, esteemed not, despised, tortured, killed, and even buried to pay the price of the sins of His people.

And now John saw Him, Jesus Christ, that He had seen crucified and buried in His full splendor, fulfilling His office, the God-man, exalted in His resurrected and glorified body.

[6:16] John beheld Jesus. Did you notice His reaction? Look at verse 17. I fell at His feet as dead.

John's natural reaction is a paralyzing terror. John was experiencing this physically, but he's describing his body.

I'm sorry, describing this spiritual encounter while his body is on the island of Patmos, but it was still his body being thrown down. Can you imagine your cheeks and your eyes pushed into the dirt at the feet of the resurrected Jesus?

Some within earshot today may have been so far from God for so long that even hearing the powerful name of Jesus Christ, the living Jesus Christ, so many times in a row like this, it may be striking you with the same terror.

The same terror as John. You feel like you need to run away or just throw yourself down on the dirt. If you're like me, in our flesh and our weakness, you can hear the accusations of your own conscience and of Satan, the accuser condemning you.

[7:38] It's terrifying to behold Jesus Christ in glory. Maybe you're telling yourself, God sees right through you. You're exposed.

Run away. Hide from Him. But notice next how God, the living Jesus Christ, is so gentle and He's so patient with John and with you and with me.

He is long-suffering toward all, desiring that none should perish. While John says, I fell at His feet as though dead. He, Jesus Christ, laid His right hand on me, saying to me, do not be afraid.

Do you notice it's this repetition from His account of the resurrection? The women that gathered and saw, they fell down and they were holding on to the feet of Jesus.

And these same words come from heaven like they did from the angel. Now from Jesus Himself, do not be afraid. Be unafraid when you are with Jesus.

[8:48] Jesus, how is this possible? It's not because John or you or I deserve to be in God's presence. John knows what we all need to know.

We cannot survive by our own merits in God's presence. No one can as a sinner. But Jesus commands John and He commands you and me.

Putting His right hand touching you. You can feel the warmth. He's alive. That same hand that had the nail go through. it. Touching those He's calling. Don't be afraid.

Why? On what basis? He says, I am the first and the last. It's who Jesus is that makes us not live in fear and even to be in His presence.

Jesus is the loving God Himself, the great I am. Behold, with eyes of faith today this glorious, loving God and the person of Jesus Christ for you and me who will receive Him.

[9:57] And I pray that you will today. Number two, behold with eyes of faith today the victory of Jesus Christ for you who love Him because He first loved you.

Behold His victory. notice what He says next in verse 18. Don't be afraid, John. I am He who lives and was dead.

Behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. Amen. Amen means let it be so. What He has spoken, receive it with His authority and affirm it.

Him, Jesus Christ, fulfilling this office God has given Him to redeem, to be a mediator, to be the one who will pray for His people pleading for us.

The one who so loves us even though we've rejected Him for so long. He says to you and me, I am the first and the last.

[11:03] Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God, the brightness of God's glory. He is the true and eternal God Himself.

Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He says, I'm the first and the last.

This is a figure of speech where two opposites are used to encompass everything in between.

And Jesus is claiming here the name of God Himself from the Old Testament. God is the one who says, I am always alive. I am the living one. Isaiah 44 verse 6, God says, I am the first and the last. Besides me, there is no God. The living Jesus Christ is God who came to save. I am He who lives and was dead.

Don't be afraid, John. You understand what has happened here. I, God the Son, am alive and I was dead.

[12:12] I truly did that. I accomplished your salvation. Jesus Christ, He truly was crucified and died and on the third day He has risen from the dead with the same body in which He suffered, with which He also ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of His Father, living to intercede for His people, to pray for them.

1 Corinthians 15, 7 and 18 says, If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile. You are still in your sins.

Then also, those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

Do you see? Christ truly died, but we don't need to be afraid anymore because He died to bury our sin and the Lord rose from the dead to prove that His life and His death satisfied the holy requirements of a just God.

Think about this. If our debt had not been paid on the cross, then Jesus, as our substitute, would have never been permitted justly to come out of prison of the grave.

The resurrection of Christ is the great discharge, someone wrote, the public acquittal of the believer. It means you are truly pardoned, truly set free.

[13:37] And because Christ rose from the dead in His same resurrected body, God calls Him the first fruits of a great harvest. The first fruits are given to God.

They're holy, they're consecrated, they're set apart for God. And so will the whole harvest be. This is where our hope comes.

Because Jesus lives. All who know life in Jesus now will also live with Him. See, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is like an earnest or a deposit of what comes next for each of us that trust in Him.

It's the morning star of the great resurrection of all those He saved. As surely as Jesus, the head is risen, so surely shall the members of His body follow along.

Acts 2.24 tells us it was not possible that Jesus should be held by death. Romans 6.9 says, we know that Christ having been raised from the dead dies no more.

[14:46] Death no longer has dominion over Him. And this is what Jesus preaches to John and to you and me. I am the living one.

This is more than just saying I'm alive. It means that Jesus combines in His one person these two contrasting titles. He is the slain Lamb of God and at the same time He's the living Lord.

A pastor from a long time ago named John Flavel wrote this, when Christ was laid in the grave death seemed to have the victory but it was only that He might pull out its sting, the sting of death.

The grave which was a prison is now for the Christian a bed of rest. Christ has perfumed the grave by His body and He warmed it for ours.

He went into the grave as our front runner and came out of the grave as our conquer. Amen. Behold with eyes of faith today the victory of Jesus Christ for you who love Him because He first loved you and me.

[16:05] number three behold with eyes of faith today the power of Jesus Christ for you who live in Him.

Behold with eyes of faith the power of Jesus Christ for all who live in Him. Jesus says next in verse 18 I have the keys of Hades and of death.

Jesus is the key holder. In the ancient Roman world there was a title for the holder of the keys. The word for key is *clavis* so the *clavicularius* is the key bearer and it was a very high ranking officer entrusted to control access into the emperor's treasury or to the grain stores of a city.

To the first century reader death and Hades were the realm of the dead. Some of you know this from Greek mythology and he's using this metaphor to say death and the underworld where the dead bodies go.

it's like a fortified city with locked gates who up here from this realm can get in or get out. And Hades was a Greek term used by the Roman world as well and it was referring to like a waiting room before your final death an intermediate state.

[17:40] And this language that John is using it's so the church can hear every notion that you've heard about what happens after this life and death. Christ is the one who rules over it who lives to intercede and to bring his people out of death and spiritual torment into heaven into paradise with him.

Christ holds the keys. It means that he has invaded enemy territory and he has plundered it. He isn't just a survivor of death. Jesus is risen as the master over death.

1 Corinthians 15:20 and 21 says now Christ is risen from the dead and has become the first fruits for all who have fallen asleep for since by man came death by man also came the resurrection of the dead.

This is the power of Jesus over the grave that having risen from the dead he's now enthroned in heaven uniting in his one wonderful person. The tenderest sympathies of divine perfections and he's also qualified to be our suitable compassionate and all sufficient savior.

This is the power of Jesus over death to minister to you and me who will trust him today. He says I hold the keys of Hades and of death.

[19:04] He has authority he has power. There was a Roman god a false god named Janus and he was often depicted holding keys to the gates of heaven and the doors of war and peace and Christ is saying in this apocalyptic language of John that Jesus is the true lord and ruler of the afterlife.

He strips all the Roman gods of their perceived power in the afterlife. Jesus claims to be the only one with the master key. Think about this Jesus doesn't leave the key to life after death in the hands of an angel.

He doesn't leave it in the hands of anyone else. He personally holds it still and uses this at his pleasure. He keeps every soul that belongs to him in his own hand.

This is our only hope in life and in death. This is the same creator God. Someone pointed out at creation it was on the third day that God caused the trees and the grass and the vegetation to flourish.

And we get in the New Testament the language of a seed being put into the earth to die. And by the death of a seed springs up new life. And this happened on the third day of creation.

[20:28] Now the third day after being buried like a seed Jesus risen from the dead. The promise of resurrection life and springing up new creation creation.

It's been baked into God's plan from the very beginning. This is our hope that every loved one that we have had to bury in Christ will receive a new glorified body and live with Jesus.

And we can trust this because Christ is the one that has the key the authority to make this so. I've mentioned to some of you and the songs and the kings got to go to the Netherlands and meet this pastor I'm referring to.

In the Netherlands almost everyone rides their bicycles everywhere. And this pastor had come about two hours away to be part of a little conference. It was an academic meeting and he was coming to understand the teachings of this old pastor from many centuries ago, John Flavel.

And he asked very difficult questions, was very sharp. He was a pastor in a different town and then afterwards when it was all over during a little reception, this pastor came over and talked to me and his eyes were welling up and he swallowed hard and he said the reason this topic of life, death, and the ministry of Jesus around the deathbed is so tender to him is because when his daughter was I believe 16 years old, she was on her bike and a bus, didn't see her, turning a corner and hit her and his daughter died.

[22:05] And he had trouble getting these words out, but he says he thinks of her every day and it helped him to appreciate the love of God the Father and giving his son, Jesus Christ, who would lay down his life so that sinners like us could belong to him and be brought into his family.

And the resurrection of Jesus is his only hope that we will be around the throne of Jesus together. father, he said, these thoughts of God have made him more patient as a pastor, as a husband, as a father, more tender, more full of gratitude for God.

And this Puritan John Flavel wrote, what a hole that the death of some children have made in the hearts of some parents which will never close up in this world.

John Flavel lost children and a wife too. that hole will never be healed in this life. It's always there. But he wrote, yet surely never did any child lie so close to a parent's heart as Christ did to his fathers.

And yet he willingly parted with him, his only son, the son of his delights, and that to death, a cursed death for sinners.

[23:27] And it's specifically because Jesus Christ was slain. on the cross that Jesus now has this authority, this power, this right over death because he bought it with his own life.

No one gets out of this world or enters into the next except through the permission of Jesus Christ and by God's appointment. Romans 8, 34 asks the question, who is he who condemns?

Satan wants to accuse and attack. And God says instead, no, think of Christ who died and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God and who also makes intercession for us.

No one can condemn you. Jesus is alive, ministering. Behold, with eyes of faith today, the power of Jesus Christ for you and me who will know life in him today.

Finally, number four, behold, with eyes of faith today, in his power, in his love, the living ministry of Jesus Christ to all who will hope in him.

[24:46] Behold, with eyes of faith that Jesus lives to minister to all who will put our hope in him. I want to take you back to the final words that Jesus said.

Behold, I am alive forevermore. I am alive forevermore. Romans 8 11 tells us, if the spirit of Christ raised from the dead now dwells in you, church, you who believe in him, he was raised from the dead, and so also he gives life to your mortal bodies through his spirit who dwells in you.

This is his living ministry because he's alive forevermore. His spirit works powerfully in us while we're still in these bodies on earth. Recently, a dear brother described how God melted his heart and it was the image of baptism and of being grafted into Jesus.

Jesus said, apart from me you can do nothing, but I'm the true vine. You are grafted into Christ. You're a branch brought into him and the life of Christ who lives forevermore flows through you. That melts our hearts. Think of the imagery.

[26:15] Because we're buried with Christ in our baptism, we have the promise that we are also spiritually raised to life in Christ now and we will be raised in a resurrected body with him one day.

He lives forever more and if you're alive in Christ you will live with him forever more. You don't need to fear death anymore. It has no more sting. This is the ministry of Christ.

The living Lord Jesus, the head of his church. Someone mentioned that they've stopped by at these open air services for many years now.

Dan mentioned it's now become our little tradition and it's not enough to stop and think about Jesus once a year, twice a year, every now and then.

Jesus is ministering that you will abide in him every single day apart from him death. He calls you to be in his family to obey all that he's commanded.

[27:19] By the father's appointment he has all authority and he ministers over his church. God has given Jesus this role now to be the supreme sovereign ruler and minister.

He is the one who calls people to himself. He is the one who instituted the church. He is the one who puts each of our lives in order. He is the one who governs his people.

He ministers as the living God with authority over his visible kingdom on earth. Local churches like this one. Not only this one, many others, hundreds of other faithful local churches.

But this is the living ministry of Jesus Christ until he comes again. It's through faithful churches! churches are the divinely ordained theater through which the holy God himself sovereignly moves us forward.

He uses the preaching of the word even through earthen vessels, the reading of the scriptures, the prayers, taking the Lord's Supper, celebrating baptisms together. These simple means that he's ordained are the way he ministers as our living Jesus Christ from heaven.

[28:37] As believers gather under the authoritative preaching of his word and a biblical church to the best of our ability, God finalizes his purposes in each of our lives.

It's not something we do alone, we do it together as his body. These are corporate means and they're the primary instruments that the spirit loves to use now.

And as we're doing these things that he's commanded, and he's praying power in the lives of those he draws to himself.

He reveals to us in and by his word the mysteries of salvation. He effectively persuades us by his Holy Spirit to believe him and to obey. It's the living Jesus Christ who finished his work for us and he promises that he will also finish his work in us.

It's his to do for his glory. Hebrews 12 tells us he's not only the author but also the finisher of our faith. He began this good work in us and he will finish preparing each one that he redeemed for eternity with him.

[29:52] He promises to one day offer up every one of us that he purchased with his own body and blood perfect and complete before the holy God. So we can say in 1 Peter 1:3 blessed be the God and Father of the living Lord Jesus who according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Behold him today. Don't put it off. Go to him. Ask God to give you eyes to see this living Jesus and follow him as his disciple.

He calls you see his love and receive him as your Lord in power. Let him put your life in order. Stop trying to do it on your own. Throw yourself like the women like John at his feet.

Let his power sweep over you and experience the peace that passes understanding that can only come from being in his presence. Let's go to him in prayer.

Lord you were lifted up on the cross then you were lifted up in glory and you say the reason you were lifted up is to draw all men from all nations tribes and tongues to you before your throne.

[31:27] Lord I pray that your spirit will cause each one here Lord to behold you by faith to see your glory your majesty and your throne and I pray Lord that our prayers are joined to Christ and that they are powerful because Christ is the righteous one interceding pleading that sinners will come to him please do your work Lord for your glory alone we ask for Christ's sake amen