

Revelation 1:9-18 4-1-18
Jesus Speaks Out on Easter

Wouldn't it be great to be able to hear Moses comment on the parting of the Red Sea? Wouldn't it be great to hear John Hancock describe the signing of the Declaration of Independence or maybe hear Lincoln discuss the Civil War? Wouldn't that be tremendous? Well, today ours is an even greater privilege as we get to hear Jesus comment on Easter. In our passage we have the record of John's vision of the exalted Christ and the words Jesus spoke about Himself. Revelation 1:**9-18**

I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, 11 saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." 12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. 14 His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15 His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. 17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

In verse 18 Jesus calls Himself the Living One and then makes three assertions about Himself. (1) I was dead (2) I am alive forever. (3) I have the keys of death and of Hades.

First, then, Jesus said, "I was dead." I was dead. Wouldn't that be a great thing to be able to say about yourself? Think about it. The humanist Bertrand Russell said, "When I die I will rot." Jesus looks back and says, "I was dead." What a testimony! We Christians love before and after testimonies. "I was a gangster. I was a Satanist. I was an addict before but now I'm saved." Well, let's see you top this. Jesus says, "I was dead."

Now, of course, you have these people who go about telling stories of how they were once clinically dead. Their heart or their brainwaves had stopped for a few minutes and then started up again. But Jesus isn't like that. He wasn't just clinically dead. As Dr. Miracle in the Princess Bride would put it, he was dead-dead. This kind of death admits of no degrees. I was reading about the late Johnny Carson this week. Ed McMahon spoke of how fearless Carson was. He tells of a time when a

zookeeper brought a giant Tarantula on the set and put it Johnny's hand. Carson says, "This spider is poisonous right?" The Zoo Man says, "Yes, but not very poisonous." To which Carson responds, "Great! So I won't be very dead." That's funny because we understand that death admits of no degrees. We used to say something or somebody was dead as a doornail, whatever that meant, but folks, dead is dead and Jesus was thoroughly and completely dead. The apostle John knew He was dead. Remember he was right there at the cross when He died.

Now, I make such a big to do over this because non-Christian skeptics who are confronted with the overwhelming evidence that Jesus Christ really did rise up and out of His tomb after being crucified have devised what is called the swoon theory. This explanation of the resurrection was proposed first about a century ago and a version of it was popularized by Hugh Schonfield in his bestseller, *The Passover Plot*. This theory says that Jesus Christ never really died on the cross, but that He merely fainted, He swooned. So, He was mistaken as being dead, was taken down and placed in a tomb.

Now listen, I will grant you that it is possible to make a mistake about someone being dead. One of the most amusing stories I have ever heard was shared with me by someone in our church. He said his boss promised his son that if he got his college degree he would send him and three of his friends on a vacation anywhere in the world. So, the young man and three friends end up in Australia and while they are driving along in their rental car a kangaroo jumps onto the road and they hit it. They all hop out and there is the kangaroo lying in the road presumably dead and one of them got the bright idea to turn this into a photo opp. So they picked up the kangaroo and took their pictures standing there with it. Then the driver takes off his college jacket, puts it on the kangaroo for a funny picture, when all of a sudden the kangaroo revives. Woah! And the revived animal was not happy. The kangaroo slugs the graduate, breaking his jaw, and then, still wearing his jacket bounces off into the distance. And what made matters much worse – the keys for the rental car were in the jacket. Oh wow! So, I grant that it's possible to mistakenly think someone has died. But the swoon theory is just too far-fetched. It defies all the gospel records which say Jesus died. The Scriptures say a soldier stuck a spear in His side and out flowed blood and water separated - a sure sign of death. All the Roman soldiers thought He was dead. Pilate thought He was dead. Joseph of Arimethea who buried him thought He was dead. His disciples and friends thought He was dead. But the swoon theory says that after being beaten, whipped, cut up by thorns in His head, crucified and finally speared in His

side, Jesus lay in His tomb for 36 hours without food or medical care and that cold, damp tomb, instead of killing Him revived Him. Jesus just got up, hopped over to the stone and moved what had to be a several ton rock. Somehow He escaped past the troop of Roman soldiers guarding Him and appeared to His disciples not as a hurting man in need of help but as the risen, conquering Lord of Life, so convincingly that all these men died preaching that message. Who could believe a ridiculous story like that? My mind much prefers the comments of Jesus, "I was dead." Really dead.

Now this story of Jesus is not to be viewed as a great comeback after a major defeat. He says, "I was dead and now I live" but Jesus chose to die and His resurrection only confirmed and revealed that fact. Christ said of His life, "I have the power to lay it down and I have power to take it up again." He said, "No one takes my life but I lay it down by my own authority." What He says in Revelation 1 is interesting. "I am the Living One, and I, the Living One, was dead." Christ said He had life in Himself - so no man could take it from Him. Only He can submit to death. And for you and for me, He did it. We call His death day - Good Friday. It was not a day of defeat but victory. But it was only a victory in light of what happened later. It was a "Good Friday" because it was a Great Sunday. When normal folks die we say, "He's dead." When Jesus died He was dead, but.... Usually we think dead, period, - not with Christ. He was dead, but, but behold now He says, "I am alive forevermore."

This is the second statement Jesus made about Himself - I am alive forevermore. He has risen from the grave and He lives. Now, just what do you think Jesus means by this? Surely, He can't mean a literal physical resurrection. We all know that is impossible. Probably what this means, or at least some would say it means that Jesus is alive to the one who has faith. The resurrection of Christ means the example and teachings of Jesus live in the heart of the believer. Nah! That fits nothing in the New Testament at all. Or maybe the resurrection of Christ means His Spirit lives on after the body dies. In Luke 24:36 the followers of Christ were sharing about how they had seen the risen Christ. **36-39** *While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be to you." 37 But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. 38 And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 "See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."* Is the resurrection merely spiritual? No, no. The apostles swore they could see Him, and hear Him and touch Him. **40-43** *40 And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His*

feet. 41 While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" 42 They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; 43 and He took it and ate it before them. Now, I know I haven't been around much, but I, at least, have never seen a ghost who ate fish. Have any of you? I thought not. Our Jesus is alive physically, risen bodily from the grave.

But, His body is certainly not the same as when He died. It apparently has some similarities, but the body of Christ is changed. He rose bodily and has a body, but this is some body. **14-16** *His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15 His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.* No wonder John, even John who had leaned on his bosom at table said, **17a** *When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man.* This is Christ in glory. Don't you ever forget it. He's not hanging, broken on a cross. He is the King of Kings, highly exalted, glorious. But, you know what is really wild? The Bible says, "We who love Him, will one day be made like Him." Really! **Philippians 3:21** *He will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory.* **I John 3:2** *we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him.* Look at the folks sitting around you. That plain looking Christian sitting next to you, will one day possess an incredible holy beauty, like Jesus Christ, so that if you saw him that way now you would fall at his/her feet as a dead man. Hard to believe, huh? But, it's true, so you treat that person with respect. The Easter message? Christ is alive, really, truly He's alive and that is so, so significant. I firmly believe that the evidence for the resurrection is thorough and convincing. I want everybody to know the facts and they should, but the power to convert a man is not in the resurrection argument, it's in the resurrected Christ. Your heart is cold and dead until the Living One touches you with life-giving, life changing power. Salvation is found, eternal and joyful life is found in an encounter, not with Christian ideas, or with Christian proofs, or with a man from history only, but in an encounter with the Living Lord Himself. And honestly, I fear that some of you here have embraced Christian teaching and Christian ideas but you have never embraced Christ Himself. And anything short of that is no salvation. To be saved, to enjoy eternal life, is to have a close encounter of the Jesus kind. And that is possible because He is alive today.

There was no doubt to the early Christians that Jesus was alive. Peter saw Him and knew it. Doubting Thomas doubted no more. He saw and believed. That hater of Christians, Saul of Tarsus, met the risen Jesus and was transformed. His whole life tells of that. John saw Jesus before His ascension and then here again in Revelation. There was no doubt in the minds of these men. John said we've seen Him, heard Him, felt Him. Paul said, I Corinthians 15:5-8 *He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.⁶ After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; 8 and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.* They knew from personal experience that Christ was and is alive. Do you? I and many others here bear witness from personal experience and relationship with Christ that He is alive? Can you do that? If not, what say you about those of us who can? Are we nuts? Or is it true that Jesus lives?

But we Christians, as sure as we are about this - we often don't live like it. We seem to forget it. So much of our thinking and acting is inconsistent with faith in a living Christ. It's as if we think He was a great teacher, but He's not alive now. I heard a pastor tell of how an older woman was criticizing him for what he said in a sermon, and she concluded by saying, "Young man, if Jesus had heard that He would have rolled over in his grave." But our leader is not dead. The embalmed remains of Nikolai Lenin, the great builder of Soviet Communism, lie in a crystal casket in a tomb in Red Square in Moscow. On the casket it says, "He was the greatest leader of all peoples, of all countries, of all times. He was the lord of the new humanity. He was the Savior of the world." Glowing praise, but did you notice? It was all in the past tense. He was. How different are the words of Christ. "I am the Living One, alive forevermore." Remember that Christian! Live like that Christian. We tend to treat dead things like they are alive and the Living One like He's dead. Some of you I bet talk to your cars and your computers. Do you talk with Jesus? Oh that our hearts would grasp that He is alive.

Since He lives you have reason to be comforted. Christ is with you. J. Hastings writes: *Jesus then would have us meet every fear with the assurance that He is the Living One. "I am the first and the last and the Living One"; not merely "the first and the last" not merely God at the beginning and God at the end, a Creator who put the world-machine into working order and who will step forward again into view at the last day to judge and punish and reward; but God who is the Living One from first to last, the Giver and Sustainer of life, upholding—carrying along—all things by the word of His power* (Hastings p. 48). He is alive now. So when you face trouble, even if the whole world is against

you, Christ is with you. That great hymn says, “When thru the deep waters I call thee to go, the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow for I will be with you.” I think of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego when they faced a hot death in a fiery furnace. The pagan king of Babylon looked into the fire and saw the three men living thru it and a fourth whose appearance he said was like a son of the gods. When trouble is there and alive Christ is there too and even more alive. Suffering Job said it well. Job 19:**25a** *As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives.* Christian be comforted.

Also, be courageous. Wimpy Christianity doesn’t jive with a living Lord. David knew this. His father sent him to take food to his brothers on the front lines, and when he arrived he found the army of Israel shaking in their boots, unwilling to take up the challenge of Goliath. David asked this, I Samuel 17:**26c** *Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?* I love it. David says it again **36** *Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the living God.* He doesn’t care how big the obstacle may be. Why not? He is serving not a dumb idol but the Living God! This truth fuels courage; it fuels boldness. This is exactly what happened to the disciples of Christ. At His death they despaired and mourned. Peter even denied Christ before a lowly servant girl. But after they encountered the risen Christ and knew He was alive they boldly announced the gospel to Jerusalem and the world. Peter, now stood before kings and said, “Christ lives - repent and believe.” These men gave their lives to herald the message about Jesus and they had the courage because they knew their Lord was alive and the risen One said to them Matthew 28:**18-19a** *All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations* **20bc** *and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.* I was dead and now I am alive forevermore.

The third and final statement Christ makes concerning Himself in verse 18 is this, “I have the keys of death and of Hades.” Now, as I grew up, I used to think that the more keys you had the more important you were. All of my heroes were janitors. But as I got older I learned that what really counts is what your keys are to. Jesus Christ has the keys to death and Hades. The possession of the keys is a symbol of ownership or in this case of Lordship. What Jesus is saying is that He controls what goes in and what goes out of death and Hades. Hades is just the place of the dead. Christ is Lord over this life and He is Lord over Hades. When land on both sides of a river is owned by the same man he also has the rights of the water. Christ is the Lord of both worlds and of the death that

separates them. He has the keys of death and Hades. He is very, very important. The power to take life, the power to send men to hell or welcome them to heaven belongs to Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Eternal Judge and that means you had better make sure, quite sure, that you are on His side. I had a friend in high-school who owned an ice-cream parlor. That's a sweet deal. I had another friend who had a key to the high-school gym - and it was great. It's a great thing to have influential friends. And it's an awful thing to have influential enemies. It will be bad enough for the enemies of Christ when they learn that He's alive, but then they will see He holds the key to heaven and hell. Uh-oh. How will Osama Bin Laden feel when he learns Christ has the keys? How will Putin feel or Kim Jong-Un or Richard Dawkins? How will they feel when they learn Christ has the keys? How will your next door neighbor feel? He might feel surprised. We've told men and women that they have the keys. Whenever you want, just claim the gift of heaven. It's there waiting for you. Not so! Jesus Christ has those keys and Matthew 25 shows Him sitting on His throne judging between the sheep and the goats and to the sheep He opens up the doors to their eternal reward but the goats He locks up in outer darkness and when that door shuts, that's it. It will be too late. When Noah got into the ark, God shut the door and left every other man behind and so will Jesus shut and lock the doors of heaven and hell. I pray you will not know what it is to see Christ shut the door of heaven in your face.

That's a dreadful thought, but one that should not bother the child of God. Death holds no fear for the child of God. Our Best Friend holds the keys of death. We have a friend to whom belongs all authority in heaven and earth. You can be sure Christ will deliver you from death for He loves you. The key-holder has sealed his love for you with his blood. He will certainly let you into paradise. That sight of Christ holding the keys strikes fear into the heart of the unbeliever, but for the person of faith it is a consolation that death and Hades is in our Savior's hands. At death's door we find our dearest friend. In Acts 7 as Stephen, an early church deacon, was about to die by stoning he looked up and was able to see Jesus standing in heaven waiting for His servant. This is the sure hope of the believer. George MacDonald writes this little poem. *Traveler, what lies over the hill? Traveler, tell to me. I am only a child at the window-sill, over I cannot see.* A verse in Richard Baxter's hymn answers it well – *My knowledge of that life is small, the eye of faith is dim; but 'tis enough that Christ knows all, and I shall be with Him.*

Will you be with Him? That's a heavy question. But Christ holds the keys. You want to be friendly with Him. The key issue, no pun intended, the key issue in your life is, "Do you have a relationship with the living Christ or not?" Not only does He have the keys, Jesus is the Key - for you. Not only does He open or close the door, He said, "I am the Door." Have you entered? Have you received the living Christ? Do you even now love Him, trust Him?

In Matthew 7 Jesus pictures a scene on judgment day when many will stand before Him pleading their case and Christ responds to them, "Depart from Me." Those are terrifying words! "Depart from me for I never knew you." You see, there was never a relationship. That is what salvation from sin is – a relationship with the Savior. Where are you today on this? Whoever you are I've got big news for you. You are going to meet Jesus Christ. Someday you will. When and how is up to you. You may meet Him today as Lord and Savior or you will meet Him later as Lord and Judge. How I wish I could convince you all. How I wish I could write on your heart these powerful words Revelation 1:**18** *I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.* Let's pray.