

NO MORE DEATH! NO MORE FEAR!
Revelation 1:12-18, 21:1-4 (11/4/2018)

What frightens you? Is there something that really makes you afraid? Speaking in public ranks high for many.

Getting sick, being incapacitated in some way, and, of course, the thought of dying, or... the thought of someone you love dying-- these can all be fearful things.

When we're real young, it's the fear of the dark--and the fear of falling. We get a little older, and we fear going to school for the first time; or later, going to Middle School.

Parents fear for the safety of their children when they're very young and so completely dependent on their care; but parents also get a bit anxious when their older children start learning to drive, or head off to social events without them, or leave for college.

Someone had the audacity to suggest to me that my hikes on the Appalachian Trail might possibly be motivated by a subconscious fear of getting older—and I think I resemble that remark!

A young boy called to wish his grandmother a Happy Birthday. He asked her how old she was--so she told him, "I'm 67." He was quiet for a time; then he asked, "Grandma, did you start at 1?"

You know, being a follower of Jesus used to be kinda' scary. It still is in some places—in parts of the world where Christians are persecuted--and even martyred—because of their faith. (We talked about this last week as we considered the last of the Beatitudes: "Blessed are those who are persecuted...")

In our text for today, the Apostle John is writing to Christians who were facing just that. They had already endured long periods of persecution.

Most of them knew fellow believers, leaders of the church, who had been imprisoned, tortured, or even put to death for refusing to renounce their faith in Christ. They were fearful.

They also knew, however, that their Lord had undergone the harshest treatment of all—and they understood that everything Christ had suffered was for them.

He never glossed over the risks either. Jesus warned them that following Him could be costly.

But I don't suppose that made it any easier. Knowing your allegiance to Christ could get you killed didn't lessen the concern any. So John, in response to these fearful things happening among these early Christians, is inspired to write this unusual book that we know as *The Revelation*.

He writes to encourage these followers of Jesus and to assure them that they are not alone in their suffering, that ultimately God will overcome their enemies; and He would reward their faithfulness. Look, please, at **Revelation 1:12-18**:

¹² I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

That reading was from chapter 1. Now, I invite you to listen to the first four verses of **Revelation 21**:

1 Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

So, two passages: one from the beginning of Revelation, the other found close to the end of the book. In the first passage, John was scared to death. He says, "I fell at his feet (the Lord's feet) as though dead..."

Did he pass out? Probably, but we can't be sure. Whatever happened, though, John tells us that Jesus put His hand on him and said: **"Don't be afraid."**

By the end of the Revelation, John sees a new heaven and a new earth, and hears a voice from the throne of God saying, **"There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain..." NO MORE DEATH! And, thus, NO MORE FEAR!**

1. This is one of the great messages we find in Holy Scripture: **God does not want His children to fearful**—not of death, or anything else, really. If our lives are in the Lord's hands, we need not fear. God tells us this often in His word.

In the **23rd Psalm, for example, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."** As you know, the Psalmist is talking about the presence of the Good Shepherd.

Later, when the angel announces Jesus' birth to a group of bewildered shepherds on a hillside, He says what? **"Fear not, for I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people."** (Luke 2:10)

I love this passage from **Matthew 10:29-31**—"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."

By the way, if we put this passage in its context, we would find that this is the third time in just six short verses that Jesus says, "Don't be afraid." He must be trying to tell us something!

Later, in the account of Jesus' resurrection, the angel says: **"Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He's not here; he has risen, just as he said."** (Matthew 28:5-6)

Now, we could go on; but what the angel says to those bewildered women brings us right back to what Jesus said to John... as He tries to alleviate John's fears: **"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."** (Revelation 1:17-18)

2. In these verses, we find several **reasons that Christ gives us for not being fearful.** If you're a Christian, if Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior, then please take to heart what this is saying: you don't need to be afraid; and here's why:

A. Jesus says: **"I am the First and the Last..."** Let's think about this. In the first chapter of his Gospel, John wrote: **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."**

He's talking about Jesus! Later, John continues, **"Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made."** (John 1:1, 30)

At the dawn of creation--the world still formless--there was God, the Father, and God, the Son. The Heavenly Father worked through His Son to create.

Dry land was formed. Vegetation grew. Fish filled the waters and animals began to roam the forests. Finally, as the crowning acts of creation, man and woman became living souls. Our Lord was right there—at the first.

But not only is Jesus "alpha," the First, He is also "omega," the Last—meaning He will still be there... when the final period is placed on the last sentence of human history.

He'll be present also when the final chapters of your life and mine are written. In fact, He promises to come at that time and take us home. He is "the First and the Last," the Alpha and Omega.

B. Next, Jesus says: **"I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold, I am alive for ever and ever!"** Jesus lived a life just like us. He worked, went to parties, laughed and cried, and even got lonely. His friends weren't always there for Him, so He felt rejection.

He got tired, hungry, and thirsty like we do. He experienced life as we experience it. He was tempted as we are tempted. He experienced life fully. "I am the Living One!"

So as we make our way through the Mondays of life, He understands. He knows about the pressures and the emotions that affect us because He's experienced these things.

Jesus also died. Some translators render the phrase "**I was dead**" as "**I became dead.**"

Even as Christ entered this world and "became flesh," He also chose to sacrifice Himself on a cross. He "became dead" for us. He experienced the pain...the loneliness and agony of death.

"But now I am alive for ever and ever!" Jesus said. Pilate won't be able to issue his verdict again.

The crowds can no longer mock him. The Roman soldiers can't beat Him nor drive the nails into His hands and feet. He's alive—and don't miss this part—Jesus is alive "for ever and ever."

C. Which brings us to this: Jesus says, "**I hold the keys of death and Hades.**" We need not fear death because our risen Lord assures us, "I've got the keys."

Try to imagine Jesus... seated at the right hand of the Father in glory. He's holding a ring of keys--the keys of death and Hades.

The word "Hades" simply means "the abode of the dead." There is only one set of keys, and Jesus has them. He used those keys on a few occasions while He was here.

Like the time when a man named Jairus came to Jesus and told Him that his little girl was sick. You know how daughters can wrap their daddies around their little fingers—she probably had.

She was just 12 years old, and her daddy loved her. Now she was struggling to survive. So this father comes to Jesus in desperation saying, "My daughter is sick. Please come and make her well!"

As Jesus begins to make His way through the crowd to go to her, the Bible tells us that a woman with an issue of blood reached out and touched His garment... and, in that moment, she was healed.

Jesus stopped to talk to her; but as the woman and her family were rejoicing, news came that the little girl had died. Isn't that the way life so often is—for one, the news is good; but for the other, it's not.

This was terrible news for this father. His heart was broken; but Jesus just keeps going. He enters her room. He picks up her lifeless hand and says, "Princess, wake up."

He can do that. Jesus has the keys. He throws open the door of death and Hades. The little girl sits up, blinks her eyes, smiles a big smile, and hugs her daddy. She probably hugs Jesus too.

This happened on other occasions—with the widow of Nain... and with Jesus' close friend, Lazarus. That time, as Jesus stands before the tomb of His friend—with Mary and Martha and other friends and family close by—we're told that "Jesus wept."

The closing of the door, the locking of all the latches—even with Jesus still holding the keys, the sadness and loss of this moment brought Jesus to tears.

But then He takes His keys; and in a loud voice, He says, "Lazarus, come forth!" The doors of death and Hades immediately swing open, and Lazarus is alive again!

Oh, and one more time, friends. They took the body of Jesus down from the cross—and talk about a mix of emotions—a few were crying. Others were simply oblivious. But there were also those who were taking pride in what had happened—in what they had managed to accomplish.

They put the body of Jesus in a tomb. A large stone was rolled into place and sealed. Guards were posted. His body was locked away.

They didn't realize that Jesus had the keys. But early in the morning on the first day of the week, our Lord took out those keys one more time, and He unlocked death's door. Jesus was alive—and this time, He's alive for evermore!

Friends, whenever we are called upon to face death—whether our own, or the death of someone we love—if Christ Jesus is our Savior and Lord, we just need to remember: there's no need to be afraid; our lives are safe in the hands of Him who holds the keys!