

THE WORD OF THE RISEN CHRIST**REVELATION 1:9-18**

Children can help us appreciate the glory of Easter Day afresh. At one Easter pageant, a 5 year old was enthralled as the scene of Jesus' crucifixion took place. He became very quiet. But then Jesus came back from the grave and there was a song of celebration. His eyes lit up and he said to his mother, "He's alive, Mom. He's alive!" At another church a cartoon video of the crucifixion and resurrection was shown to some kindergarten age children. When Jesus was buried, one little boy who knew the story well turned to his little buddy and said, "He's dead now, but He'll be back." Indeed.

Over several Sundays leading up to Easter Day, we've been reflecting on Jesus' seven statements as He hung on the cross. *Cross Words: Jesus' Statements Before He Died* is the title of the message series. But Jesus didn't stay dead, did He? We serve a risen Savior! I thought it would be most appropriate to reflect together today on one more statement from Jesus. This was a statement He made after He died and rose again. This was a statement He made from the throne room of Heaven instead of from an old rugged cross here on Earth. This statement completed the story of the cross and gives us the right perspective as we celebrate Jesus' resurrection and all it should mean to us past, present, and future. Let's read it together just now. I call those last two verses "The Word of the Risen Christ." Jesus said, "Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last. I am the living one. I died, but look—I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave." (Rev 1:17-18 NLT)

The risen Jesus appeared to one of his original disciples, John. Now, John was imprisoned on the Roman Empire's version of Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay. You can visit the Isle of Patmos today as a tourist, but you wouldn't have done that back in the first century. The whole island – about 10 miles long by 6 miles wide and some 35-40 miles from the mainland – was one big jail. Apparently, the authorities considered John to be some kind of great threat to Roman rule and he'd been exiled to Patmos. The Romans hoped putting John in prison would slow down the growth of the Christian faith which had spread like one of those forest fires out West in the 60-70 years after Jesus rose from the dead and ascended back to Heaven. Jesus wanted John to share some great and encouraging news with His followers in seven churches located in what is now Turkey. It was great and encouraging news back then and it's still great and encouraging news for Jesus followers this morning. What Jesus said reveals at least three great facts we can celebrate about the risen Christ today. First...

THE RISEN CHRIST IS ETERNALLY MAJESTIC.

How many of you this morning would like to see Jesus face to face and in person? Be careful what you ask for! Now, John had seen Jesus face to face as one of His disciples, but on this occasion the Bible says, "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as if I were dead." (Rev. 1:17 NLT) When we think of seeing Jesus face to face and in person we tend to think of Him as He might have appeared in the Gospels – human, humble, kind, gentle, approachable. Jesus didn't look that way to John in Revelation 1! Being

face to face with Jesus and in person filled John with so much fear, dread, and terror that he collapsed on the ground. He was utterly and completely overwhelmed.

Revelation 1 has a very different take on Jesus! I don't think it claimed this is how Jesus literally looks today. There's a whole lot of imagery and symbolism in how Jesus was portrayed in what we read. But I do think the Bible is revealing to us that Jesus is eternally majestic beyond our very limited comprehension. We're apt to forget Jesus' time here on Earth was a very small parentheses – 33 years or so – in the eternal life span of the Son of God. Yes, when Jesus literally walked on this Earth, He was indeed limited. He was humble. He was fully and genuinely human. And when He suffered and died on the cross, He did experience weakness and humiliation willingly on our behalf. We love all that about Jesus and we should. But before He was born in Bethlehem and after He ascended back to Heaven following His mighty resurrection, Jesus, the Son of God, was and is eternally majestic. And His eternal majesty and incomprehensible glory is just as true and should be just as precious to us.

So what? Why is this important? All of us have a tendency to create a Jesus in our own image – a Jesus we can control and manage instead of the true, genuine Jesus. Kevin DeYoung has reminded us that Jesus is very popular in America, but not every Jesus is the real Jesus. Kevin has observed that there's the Republican Jesus—who's against tax increases and activist judges, for family values and owning guns. There's Democrat Jesus—who is against Wall Street and Wal-Mart, for reducing our carbon footprint and printing money. There's Therapist Jesus—who helps us cope with life's problems, heals our past, tells us how valuable we are and not to be so hard on ourselves. There's Open-minded Jesus—who loves everyone all the time no matter what (except for people who are not as open-minded as you). There's Touchdown Jesus—who helps athletes run faster and jump higher than non-Christians and determines the outcomes of Super Bowls. There's Gentle Jesus—who was meek and mild, with high cheek bones, flowing hair, walked around barefoot, and wore a sash while looking kind of German. There's Yuppie Jesus—who encourages us to reach our full potential, reach for the stars, and buy a boat. There's Spirituality Jesus—who hates religion, churches, pastors, priests, and doctrine, and would rather have people out in nature, finding "the god within" while listening to ambiguously spiritual music. There's Revolutionary Jesus—who teaches us to rebel against the status quo, stick it to the man, and blame things on "the system." There's Boyfriend Jesus—who wraps his arms around us as we sing about his intoxicating love. There's Good Example Jesus—who shows you how to help people, change the planet, and become a better you.

So who is Jesus to you this Easter Day? Is He just a faraway figure of first century fantasy? Is He someone who helps you when you have a problem but you ignore Him otherwise like dashboard Jesus? Is He someone who snuggles up to you and makes you feel happy inside? When we see Jesus as He truly is, we're more likely to fall at His feet as though we were dead not engage in a cozy snuggle. John saw a Jesus who is mind-blowing, dramatically powerful, and eternally majestic every day and all day. Notice how Jesus described Himself here, "Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last. I am the living one." (Rev 1:17 NLT) Quite a self-declaration, isn't it? Jesus claimed

He is God – He’s never known a beginning and will never know an end. He begins and ends all things. He is both Creator and Consummator. All things were made by Jesus and all things find their ultimate fulfillment in Him. His statement here is another way of saying, “I am the Alpha and the Omega—the beginning and the end. I am the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come—the Almighty One.” (Rev 1:8 NLT) This Jesus isn’t a reflection of our culture or the projection of our own desires. He is Lord and God. He is the Father’s Son, substitute for our sins, Savior of the world, the One who lives forever, and the One who is more loving, more holy, and more wonderfully terrifying than we ever thought possible. St. Augustine pretty well nailed it with this observation, “Christ is not valued at all, unless he is valued above all.” My friend, make sure you celebrate the right Jesus this Easter Day – the One who is eternally majestic. Revelation 1 helps us to celebrate a second great fact about Jesus, the risen Christ.

THE RISEN CHRIST IS MY PROPHET, PRIEST, AND KING.

In the Old Testament, three primary leadership positions emerged as being all important among God’s people, the Jews. They were prophets, priests, and kings. Now in Revelation 1, Jesus is not referred to as prophet, priest, or king explicitly. But it does seem to be the point of much of the imagery and symbolism in how Jesus is depicted there. Normally, the three offices of prophet, priest, and king were distinct from each other with no overlap. In other words, a king was never also a priest or a prophet. A priest never functioned as a prophet or a king. And a prophet simply did a prophet’s job without trying to be a either king or a priest. But Jesus, the risen Christ, perfectly fills all three roles simultaneously: He is the Prophet, Priest, and King to the great blessing of the world as well as to you and me personally.

What was the role of a prophet? Prophets were tasked with speaking God’s Word to people. In the Old Testament, this included both proclaiming God’s truth to others and revealing God’s plans for the future. Well, Jesus is the One who brings God’s truth to you and me. We know Jesus did this in His earthly ministry. The people of Jesus’ day referred to Him as a prophet many times. Jesus taught the Word of God and the people were amazed at his authority. Much like the Old Testament prophets, Jesus foretold future events - even His own death and resurrection.

The imagery in Revelation 1 that best underlined Jesus as Prophet is found first in v. 14. “His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow. And his eyes were like flames of fire.” A head with white hair conveyed the idea of wisdom and dignity. Blazing eyes underlined the penetrating insight of the One who is sovereign over all human history and humanity itself. V. 16 also pointed to Jesus as the Prophet. “A sharp two-edged sword came from his mouth.” The sword in Jesus’ mouth symbolized the power and force of His message. His words are sharp and penetrating; they cut right through our defenses and pretenses with His truth. Jesus doesn’t just speak God’s Word as a merely human prophet. He is Himself the Word of God made flesh. He is God’s final and best message, the ultimate revelation of God. The Bible says, “Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets.

And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son.” (Heb 1:1-2 NLT)
The risen Christ is the ultimate Prophet. But is He your Prophet this Easter Day?

What was the role of a priest? Old Testament priests served as mediators between human beings and God. It was the priests who offered sacrifices on behalf of the people. A priest was someone who himself had access to God and who opened the way for others to come to God. No one filled that role better than Jesus, the risen Christ. He is the One who enables you and me to enter into the presence of God. Part of the imagery describing the risen Christ here in Revelation 1 was meant to remind us of the garments worn by the high priest in the Old Testament. “He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest.” (Rev 1:13 NLT) The Bible says, “There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus.” (1 Tim 2:5 NLT) The Bible also says, “We have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God.... Let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.” (Heb 4:14-16 NLT) Because Jesus is our High Priest, we can come before God boldly, knowing Jesus has true compassion for us and that, through Him, we will experience the grace and mercy of God. The risen Christ is the ultimate Priest. But is He your Priest this Easter Day?

What was the role of a king? In the Old Testament, the king was the one who had ultimate authority and power. He ruled over God’s people and protected them from any and all enemies. Jesus, the risen Christ, is the One to whom God has given all power and dominion forever. Again, the clothing Jesus wore in Revelation 1 indicated a person of great dignity and authority. In addition, it says there, “His eyes were like flames of fire. His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice thundered like mighty ocean waves.” (Rev 1:14-15 NLT) Fire is associated with judgment, bronze is symbolic of permanence and stability, and a thundering voice points to authority. This is someone large and in charge! The risen Christ said to His disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth.” (Mt 28:18 NLT). The Bible says about Jesus post-resurrection, “God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Ph 2:9-11 NLT) And a bit later in the book of Revelation we learn Jesus was given this title, “King of all kings and Lord of all lords.” (Rev. 19:16 NLT)

Most kingdoms do everything to protect their king. This is the premise of the game of chess, for example. When the king falls, the kingdom is lost. Therefore, the king must be protected at all costs. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill desperately wanted to watch the Allied invasion of Nazi-occupied Europe on D-Day from the bridge of a battleship in the English Channel. U.S. General Eisenhower was desperate to stop him. He didn’t want the Prime Minister getting killed in battle. Eisenhower finally appealed to a higher authority: Great Britain’s King George VI. The king told Churchill that if it was the Prime Minister’s duty to witness the invasion, he had to conclude it was also his own duty as king to join him on the battleship. Churchill reluctantly agreed to back down,

because he knew he could never expose the King of England to such danger. King Jesus did exactly the opposite. With royal courage he surrendered His body to be crucified. On the cross He offered a king's ransom: His life for the life of His people. He would die for all the wrong things we had ever done and would do, completely atoning for all our sins. The crown of thorns that was meant to make a mockery of Him actually proclaimed His kingly dignity, even in death. The risen Christ is the ultimate King. But is He your King this Easter Day? Make sure you celebrate the right Jesus this Easter Day - He is Prophet, Priest, and King! Revelation 1 helps us to celebrate a third great fact about Jesus, the risen Christ, today.

THE RISEN CHRIST HAS CONQUERED DEATH FOREVER.

Hear again what else Jesus said to John. "I am the living one. I died, but look—I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave." (Rev 1:18 NLT) Death is an inescapable fact of life. Over 1 million Americans have died of COVID since the beginning of the pandemic. Another 5 million people around the world have died of COVID as well. Statisticians estimate over 166,000 people die around the world every day of all causes or around 60 million every year. One day and one year in the future you and I will be part of those statistics. It's inevitable and inescapable. How do you feel about that? I've never been able to understand those people who say, "Well, I don't believe in any afterlife. When you're dead, you're dead. You just go out of existence and you have no awareness of anything anymore." Really? If people really believe that I honestly don't know how they get up and function every day! The thought of just going out of existence forever leaves me feeling paralyzed with dread and fear.

Do you know what the Bible says about that? "For only as a human being could he (Jesus) die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying." (Heb. 2:14-15 NLT) As a result of His resurrection, Jesus did not eliminate death and dying. One day the Bible says He will do even that, but not just yet. You and I will still die. But He did change it forever. The power of death is the fear it creates in your heart and mine. The devil loves to exert that power against us by filling us with anxiety about death and dying. But Jesus destroyed that power when He rose from the dead. It's no longer the end of everything. Yes, it still happens. But Jesus has changed and transformed it into a door or a gate from this life to a new life.

Now, Jesus made it very plain here that He did in fact fully experience physical death on the cross. He was as dead as dead could be when they laid His body in the tomb. The Roman soldiers didn't fail to do their job well. Jesus wasn't pretending. Jesus most definitely died, but now He was and is alive. Furthermore, He is alive again forever or eternally. That means He will never experience death again. You remember Jesus raised his friend, Lazarus, from the dead. But Lazarus died again some years later. Not Jesus. He didn't rise from the dead just to die again. While He fully experienced death as a human being, He has forever conquered it as the Son of God. The victory that Jesus won over sin and death was a permanent victory.

But there's more good news in Jesus' statement especially for you and me. Jesus also said here He now holds the keys of death and the grave. Your translation of the Bible might use the word Hades rather than the grave. What was Hades? It meant different things to different people. People in the first century thought of Hades as the place where your soul or spirit goes after it's been separated from your body at death. For some Christians, it was the place where your spirit resided until Jesus resurrected your body. For other Christians, it was the place where only the spirits reside of those who had rejected Jesus in this life. But don't get hung up on the meaning of Hades! Don't lose the forest for the trees! Here's what Jesus was saying, "I am now completely and absolutely in charge. I forever control everything that has to do with dying, the experience of death, and what happens to you and where you go after you die." That's what it meant to have the keys to something. Whoever has the keys has ultimate power – the final say. Jesus is the keeper of the gate into the afterlife. He alone locks and unlocks the door into either Heaven or Hell. The devil never did have the power to determine life or death and he isn't even the lord of Hell itself. Jesus was, is, and will be. And you can be sure Jesus never lets the devil borrow those keys!

What's the big takeaway for you and me this Easter Day? The Bible says, "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life." (1 Jo 5:12 NLT) There is no need for you, as a follower of Jesus, to fear death. Experience it? Yes. Fear it? No. Jesus is the Living One who has conquered death and holds it in His power. It's kind of like someone whispering to us that they know the secret way out of some dungeon where we've been imprisoned. "I've got the keys and I know the way out of here! There's nothing more to worry about." Because death can no longer affect Jesus, it can no longer affect you or me permanently. Jesus was there the day you were born. Jesus will be there the day you die. And Jesus will still be there every day of eternity. Like Jesus said, "Since I live, you also will live." (Jo 14:19 NLT)

On the last Saturday of October back in 2010, the Opera Company of Philadelphia brought together over 650 choir members from 28 participating organizations to perform what they called "a random act of culture" at Macy's department store in Center City Philadelphia. Accompanied by the Wanamaker Organ – the world's largest pipe organ – the singers infiltrated the store as shoppers and then burst into a pop-up rendition of the Hallelujah Chorus to the delight of surprised shoppers. I don't know why but this video always moves me to tears. I think its because in the midst of this very broken world where so much is wrong, we followers of Jesus get to proclaim every Easter Day – and every other day for that matter – who Jesus is and what He has done. Watch, sing along, and enjoy

Hear once again the word of the risen Christ this Easter Day! "Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last. I am the living one. I died, but look—I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave." (Rev 1:17-18 NLT) He is eternally majestic. He is our Prophet, Priest, and King. He has conquered death forever. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Happy, happy Easter!