

## THE LIVING ONE

Readings: Matt 28; 1 Cor 15:1-11; Rev 1

Text: Revelation 1:17b-18

Theme: Jesus revealed himself to John as the living eternal God so he would not be afraid.

Purpose: To encourage us with the truth that Jesus is the living and eternal God so as to keep us from fear.

Every Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus as we meet together on the first day of the week. But *Easter Sunday* is a *special* remembrance of the resurrection of our Lord, an annual celebration of the Christian church throughout the world that “Christ the Lord has risen today!”

Today we want to consider the appearance of our risen Lord Jesus to the apostle John and his description of himself from these verses in Revelation chapter 1.

**Context:** This revelation to John was probably given around 90 AD during a period of persecution of the church. Many believers were being put to death. Some were exiled, like the apostle John. He had been sent to the Island of Patmos, a small and rocky island in the Aegean Sea about 80 kms off the coast of modern Turkey. He was an old man, probably in his 80s, and was going through the same tribulation that many other Christians were suffering.

He must have wondered what God was doing in having him remain on this island far away from the church he had been serving as a pastor, which was probably in Ephesus.

One day something remarkable occurred on this island.. It happened on the Lord’s Day, the first day of the week, a Sunday.

John said that he was “in the Spirit”, which means he was in a state of being ready to receive a revelation from God; he was aware of God and open to the Holy Spirit.

He heard a loud voice behind him, like a trumpet. He turned around to see the voice that was speaking to him and he saw a vision of the Lord Jesus as King.

John had seen a vision of Jesus like this before on the Mount of Transfiguration when he was with his brother James, and Peter. The three of them saw Jesus in all his brilliant glory just prior to his suffering and death.

John had also seen Jesus a number of times after Jesus had risen from the dead, during those 40 days between his resurrection and his ascension.

Here, about 60 years later, he saw Jesus as the exalted and glorious king, the ruler of heaven and earth!

John knew Jesus well; he was, after all, the disciple Jesus loved, the one closest to him. But with a vision like this, John was overcome with awe and fear and fell to the ground as though dead (v 17).. But Jesus placed his right hand on him, to reassure him and to help him up, and he spoke to him.

On this Easter Sunday we will look closely at the five phrases Jesus used to describe himself to John.

### 1. Jesus said, “**I am the First and the Last.**”

This is how *God* described himself in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 44 we read, “This is what the Lord says - Israel’s King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty; I am the first and the last; apart from me there is no God” (v 6).

*Jesus* described himself using the same phrase. He could do that because he was and is fully God, the second person of the trinity.

He describes himself like this three times in this book of Revelation, first to John in these verses, then in chapter 2:8 when he introduces himself to the church in Smyrna, and then again in the last chapter in chapter 22:13 when he spoke about his second coming.

There he said; “Behold, I am coming soon.... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.” All three of these phrases mean much the same. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet; Jesus was saying that he was the A and the Z.

This means that he is eternal, but it also means that he is the beginning and end of our salvation. The writer of Hebrews described him as the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:3). Our entire salvation *comes* from him and will be *finished* by him. He who began this work in us will bring it to completion on the day of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:6).

Jesus can and will do this because he is the centre of God’s plan of salvation. Right at the beginning of this book we are introduced to the main person, the central character of this drama, the Lord Jesus. This letter is “the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:1). As this book unfolds in its letters and visions Jesus is central to everything that happens; he rules over all things and everything is connected to him and governed by him.

But that is true not only of this last book of the Bible but of the entire Bible. It is all about Jesus, the Son of God, from the first verse to the last. He is the subject of all the prophecies and their fulfilment. He is the Messiah promised to Israel and he is the Saviour of the world! He is the Beginning and the End, the centre and pivot of all things. He is the First and the Last.

## 2. He then said, “**I am the Living One**”

Jesus said this against the background of the ancient pagan world where there were many gods – the gods of the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans. Those nations worshipped the sun, moon and stars, they worshipped animals and images made out of gold and silver, wood and stone.

These idols, “...have mouths but they cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot hear, noses but they cannot smell, they have hands but they cannot feel, feet but they cannot walk” (Ps 115:5ff). In other words, they are dead! They are lifeless! They have no life in themselves, and they cannot give anyone life!

But Jesus is “the Living One!” To the Jews he said, “As the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself” (John 5:26). “Such as the Father is, such is the Son” (Athanasian Creed); Jesus is equal to the Father in all things, fully God, fully divine and fully alive! He is the author and fountain of life.

Jesus used water as a symbol of life when he spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well; “...whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14).

To Martha, standing outside the tomb of her brother Lazarus, Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25f). This is the great promise of Jesus to you: if you believe in him you will have eternal life!

Jesus said, “I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One.”

## 3. Then he said, “**I was dead.**”

Jesus spoke of an historical fact, recorded in all four gospels, seen by hundreds of witnesses, confirmed by ancient histories other than the Bible. We confess this in the Apostles Creed: Jesus “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried.”

One of the Roman soldiers established that Jesus had died when he thrust a spear in Jesus’ side bringing forth a mixture of blood and water. The Roman centurion supervising the crucifixion of Jesus sent a message to Pilate confirming that Jesus had certainly died.

We remember this on Good Friday and we remember this every time we celebrate the Lord’s Supper - that Jesus died, not for his own sin, because he had none, but for your sin and mine. He died in the place of his people. He died as a substitute for us, for all who believe in him. Do you believe this? This is the only way to receive forgiveness of sins, that is, through faith in the death of Jesus Christ.

Notice that Jesus put this in the *past tense*; “I was dead”.. He had been dead, but then he came alive again! He had died, but he was raised to life! He died once and for all to make a complete atonement for all our sin. He died once to cover forever all the sins of all his people. His death was the completion of his sacrificial work, so that just before he died he could cry out, “It is finished!”

The writer of Hebrews puts it like this; “Just as a man is destined to die once and after that to face the judgement, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people, and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (Heb 9:27f). His sacrificial work is complete, finished and never to be repeated!

4. Jesus said, “I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One. I was dead **and behold I am alive forever and ever!**”

Death could not keep Jesus in the grave. We sing of that in these triumphant Easter hymns!  
“Death cannot keep his prey – Jesus my Saviour,  
He tore the bars away – Jesus my Lord.”

Not only is Jesus alive but he is alive “*forever and ever*”!

In 90 AD, which was about the time John received this revelation, the Roman Empire was named “the Eternal Empire”.. But 300 years later the empire was overrun by the Huns and the Goths. None of the kings or kingdoms of this world are eternal; they will all fade away, they will all come to nothing.

But Jesus is eternal; he is alive forever and ever. His kingdom is the Eternal Empire and he is the eternal King. “His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14)..

5. Jesus then said to John, “**and I hold the keys of death and Hades.**”

The terms death and Hades are closely related together.

i. *Death* comes when your heart stops pumping and you stop breathing and your brain wave goes flat. At that point your soul, or your spirit, leaves your body and goes to the place where it will spend the rest of eternity.

*Where* your soul goes depends on the response you have made to Jesus in this life.

If you refused to believe in him and pursued your own life then your soul will go directly to *hell*.

If you have confessed your sins and have believed in Jesus as your Lord and Saviour then your soul will go directly to *heaven*.

ii. *Hades* in the Bible refers to this separation of the body and the soul. Hades is not hell but it is the realm of the dead; it is the disembodied state.

iii. Jesus holds the keys of death and Hades.

Keys are a symbol of ownership and authority.

When you buy a house and have signed the legal papers and have paid your deposit you will be given the keys to the house.

It is the same when purchase a car; once you have signed for it and paid your money the salesman will hand you the keys – the car now belongs to you.

Jesus has the keys over death and Hades; that is, he has authority over death and Hades; he decides when we are born and when we will die and where we will go. Out times are in his hands.

This separation of body and soul is not the end for the Christian. When Jesus rose from the dead he did so as “the firstborn from the dead” (Rev 1:5).

When he returns he will join our souls and our bodies together again at the resurrection of the dead. Jesus said, “a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:28f).

Because Jesus died and rose again, and because he is the Living One, and because he holds our lives in his hands, he could say to John, and to you and me, “**Do not be afraid.**” (v 17)

The sight of the Lord Jesus as King and God was terrifying to John and he was overwhelmed. But Jesus appeared, not only in his glorious majesty as God, but also as the Chief Shepherd, as the Head of his body, as the Living One.

He said, “Do not be afraid.” This was the message Jesus wanted to communicate to John, and, through him, to the Christians in the seven churches of Asia Minor, and to all God’s people through all of history.

This was a great comfort for John, lonely and isolated on the Island of Patmos.

It was a great comfort for the Christians in the first century going through a terrible persecution. They did not know what tomorrow would bring for themselves or their families. They could be arrested for their faith, thrown to the lions or crucified.

But they could put their trust in Jesus because he was with them. They could say with David; “Even though I go through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff, they comfort me” (Ps 23:4)..

This is our comfort today. Many of us have our own worries and concerns – about our own health, about the physical or spiritual wellbeing of our children or grandchildren, about our job, our study, our future.

Jesus is the same today as he was then; he is the First and the Last, the Living One, the eternal God. He is with us as a church, as families and as individuals.

He is with you always, continuously, personally.

To you he says; “Do not be afraid”.

Amen