

## No Fear; He Holds the Keys

### Revelation 1:4-18 (NIV)

<sup>4</sup> John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, <sup>6</sup> and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. <sup>7</sup> “Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.” So shall it be! Amen. <sup>8</sup> “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” <sup>9</sup> I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. <sup>10</sup> On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, <sup>11</sup> which said: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.” <sup>12</sup> I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. <sup>15</sup> His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. <sup>16</sup> In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Okay. Gotta remember everything. Water bottle. Bible. Suit coat. Laptop. Those paper plates I’m donating to the church kitchen. Got it. Okay. Good. Wait. Wait. (Check my pockets...) Wallet. Phone. Wait. Something’s missing. There, on the driver’s seat. You try the door. Oh No! Your stomach sinks. You just locked your keys in your car.

When the door you want to go through is locked and you don’t have the keys, it’s frustrating. It causes a moment of panic. Out of desperation, you may kick the door or tug on it extra hard hoping that it will budge. Maybe that one friend you know pulls out their credit card to start jimmying the lock. Short of breaking a window or breaking down the door, the locked door wins.

Death is a kind of locked door for us. People go through it but can’t come back out it. We try to open the door and bring them back, but the door is locked. That’s where the panic sets in, the fear that we will never see this person again. Pound on their chest. Plead with the doctors to do something, anything. But at some point, there is nothing we can do to bring them back. No amount of our effort opens that door. We don’t have the keys that unlocks death.

What was running through John’s mind when he started writing this letter and received this vision? He had outlived all his brothers, the other Eleven who had walked and talked with Jesus, followed him for three years until he was crucified. Did he long to go and be with his brother, James, who went through the door of death nearly 50 years ago compliments of the sword of King Herod Agrippa I. All the rest died martyrs’ deaths as well – crucified, beheaded, stoned, stabbed, tortured to death. John was the only one of the 12 still alive. Now he was exiled by the Roman Emperor on an island named Patmos, separated from his brothers and sisters in Christ. Did John fear what would happen next? Would he die here, die of starvation, die as a contingent of Roman soldiers came and silenced him for good. Would he die of old age, alone on this island, away from his fellow believers whom he loved so much?

Do you fear death as a locked door? Do you see it, know it’s there, have seen others pass through it, but fear what’s behind that door? Do you just stay away from it, ignore it because hey, I’m living, what do I need to think about dying for? Do you look at that locked door and think, “I hope I can go peacefully in my sleep.” Or “However it happens, just let it happen quickly. Don’t let me suffer.” Or “You know, Jesus can return any day. Come, Lord Jesus, before I have to die. Come and spare me from going through the locked door of death.”

Maybe it’s not so much going through the locked door of death that scares us as much as it worries us what will happen to our spouses, our families, our friends after we have gone through it. Will they be okay? Will they be provided for? Will they be lonely? Will anyone care for them the way I did? We know we can’t come back out the door once we go through it. God has made it clear that once we die, we are in heaven or hell with no more crossing over into the world. The door of death locks behind us.

As John may indeed have been pondering when he would go through the locked door of death and never go back through to be with his brothers and sisters in Christ in the seven churches, Jesus came to him in a vision. Jesus appeared to him with overwhelming power and surpassing glory, bright fire and blinding light, holy majesty and intimidating purity. John tells us, “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.” (verse 17a) This is it. I’m going through the door. This is how I die. I am not getting off this island.

Then [Jesus] placed his right hand on [John] and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." (verses 17b-18)

Jesus holds the keys of death and Hades. This is huge! This means that death and hell have no mastery over Jesus. Jesus was not killed on that Friday some 2000 years ago as if his life was stolen from him. He gave up his spirit. He chose to die. Death did not choose him. And death did not nor was able to hold him. The door of death was not locked to Jesus; he has the keys to lock and unlock that door as he pleases. He proved this by rising from the dead on the third day. Just as he walked through the door of death, he turned right around, unlocked the door, and came back out alive! Death has no power or say over Jesus; he holds the keys.

That's why his title is now the Living One. He was dead, but he unlocked the door to death just as easily as we unlock the door to our cars. He will never die again. He is alive for ever and ever! He makes us alive spiritually for ever and ever because he "loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood." (verse 5b) When the day comes when we have to walk through that door of death, we need never fear it because we walk into eternal life with Jesus. The only locked door is the door to hell. We will not walk through it because of Jesus' love which caused him to lay down his life for us into death only to walk right back through that door of death alive! He holds the keys to eternal life and uses them for us, for our benefit.

Jesus Christ, the Living One, is also the firstborn from the dead. When the Living One returns on the Last Day – just as he said he would – he will raise all of our bodies back from the dead and make our bodies perfect, so that we will live forever and ever with him, never to die again. The door of death will be a door no one ever has to walk through again. It will be locked up forever.

When death comes for us, it has no power over us because Jesus holds the keys. He is the First and the Last, the Alpha and the Omega, the unchangeable and eternal one, the one who is faithful to his Word, the one who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty. Death does not force Jesus' hands. Instead, since he holds the keys, he makes death do his bidding. He locks it and unlocks it as he knows is best for us.

Jesus prepares us for that day to walk through that door by giving grace and peace to us. His grace, his love that was never earned or deserved, caused him to lay his life down for us, to go through death's door, in order to unlock it for us. We can walk through it without fear because we know what awaits on the other side: our loving, unchangeable God who holds the keys of death, the one who has freed us from our sins by his blood. We have peace with God knowing that our sins are paid for and Christ controls death.

That's not all that the Living One has done for us. He "has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father." (verse 6a) Some are still locked in sin and by the fear of death. But locked doors could not keep out Jesus' message of holding the keys to death. He appeared to his disciples to unlock their fear of death because he lives!

Just as Jesus commissioned his disciples in that locked room on that very first Easter Sunday, he has given us those same keys. Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (John 20:22-23) Jesus holds these keys forever and gave them to us to use for others, to announce to them that God loves us and has unlocked us from our sins by his blood, that since he rose from the dead on the third day, death holds no power over us. Jesus holds power over all death, including ours, and unlocks that door of death to be eternal life with him. This is what he has made us to share as his priests.

No one can keep Jesus from using these keys of unlocking the doors to death and Hades, of unlocking the door to eternal life with him. When the Jews tried to lock up this message by literally locking the apostles away in a jail cell, what happened? During the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people all about this new life." (Acts 5:19-20) Sinful men cannot keep the message of forgiveness locked up. No matter what they do, Jesus still holds the keys. He still is the one in control, the Almighty, the Alpha and the Omega, the ruler of the kings of the earth, that nothing happens unless he allows it.

Today is the Lord's Day because he conquered death on Sunday, showing that he holds the keys of death and Hades in his hands. Do not be afraid. Jesus unlocks the door of death to be instead eternal life with him. He locks the door to hell with his life, preventing us from ever walking through it. He holds these keys forever, keys that unlock us from our sins to live with him, the Living One, forever. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen!