

Don't Be Afraid

by Mark Jarvinen

We live in a crazy world. Tragedies, catastrophes, and crises strike without warning. We sit on pins and needles waiting to hear about the next terrorist strike. Internationally, tensions rise among nations suddenly, without warning. Violent crime is turning our inner cities into ghettos of fear and anger. It seems like Satan is working overtime. No wonder people are asking **“Is anyone in charge? Is God really in control?”**

Yes, at a glance, things seem out of control today, but I'm sure people in every generation have felt similar kinds of stress points. In fact, the **Apostle John**, the author of **Revelation**, must have had his questions too. At the age of 80, John was the last of the apostles left alive. All the others had already been martyred. Under Roman Emperor, **Domitian**, John, who had been serving as the Bishop to the church in Ephesus, was exiled to a small barren island in the Aegean Sea, called **Patmos**. At the same time, Christians in the Empire were being persecuted – thrown to the lions and used as human torches to provide light for public gatherings. By refusing to bow to Caesar, many Christians died painful deaths.

In the midst of this persecution, John was worshipping the Lord from his isolated island prison, when suddenly, the Holy Spirit gave him a vision of Jesus. Although it had been 60 years since John had seen Jesus in the flesh, John knew it was Jesus, in all of His risen and ascended glory. He describes this vision of Jesus in **vv. 13-15 -**

“... like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.”

This vision was the Son of Man shining forth in the brilliance of God’s own majesty and glory. John writes about his reaction to his vision in **Revelation 1:17-18;**

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 now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

These words of Christ, spoken to John in the 1st century are also beneficial for us today. Jesus said, **“Do not be afraid.”** These were words of comfort and reassurance both for John then, and for us now, especially when we view the ominous and uncertain events in the world and in our own personal lives.

When Jesus said these words to John, the first thing he meant was **“Don’t be afraid of Me.”** After all, John’s description of Jesus in His majesty and glory in **vv. 13-15** does sound a bit scary. **Verse 17** says that John ***“fell at his (Jesus’) feet as though dead.”*** Apparently, John was afraid of the figure of Jesus who appeared to him in his vision. This is what happens when sinful people come into contact with a Holy God. We see the same reaction throughout the **OT** when various men of God encountered His glorious presence, e.g. Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah to name a few. But note again Jesus’ first words to John in the midst of his fear – **“Do not be afraid.”**

The Lord ministers to John as if to say, ***“I am your friend, not your enemy. I am for you, not against you.”***

What was true for John is also true for us. **We know it’s true because of what Jesus accomplished through his death and resurrection.** In his death, Jesus paid the penalty for the sins of a fallen humanity. This sin nature that we are all born with, called ***“the old nature”*** or the ***“Old Adam,”*** or ***“the flesh,”*** is continuously at war with God and commits open acts of rebellion against Him. This sinful nature dares to imagine that we, as humans, are the masters of our fate, and the captains of our souls, who can be selective about the parts of God’s Law that we will obey. This selective obedience, however, is actually an expression of our rebellion **against a just God, who must be true to His nature and punish sin.** As **Romans 6:23a** says, ***“The wages of sin is death, ...”*** or eternal condemnation and separation from God. However, in the very next breath, **Romans 6:23b**, we hear the good news, ***“but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*** In other words, **Christ took upon Himself the punishment that we deserve. The debt of our sin has been paid in full through his death on the cross.** Therefore, instead of receiving the judgment we deserve, God gives to us His grace to trust Christ’s sacrifice made on our behalf. This is a grace that we could never in a thousand lifetimes earn for ourselves. Jesus’ death paid for our sins, and His resurrection sealed the deal – more on this in a moment – but suffice it to say, because the death and resurrection of Jesus are true, we don’t have to be afraid. Death is defeated! New life in Christ is ours!

In the brief two verses of our text, in vv. 17-18, Jesus gives three reasons why we need not be afraid:

I. JESUS SAID, “I AM THE FIRST AND THE LAST.”

The sense of Jesus’ designation of himself as **“the first and the last”** is exactly equivalent to what Jesus calls himself in **Revelation 1:8** – **“I am the Alpha and the Omega”**, (the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet), and in Scripture a title used only of God. For example, in **Isaiah 44:6**, God declares, **“I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.”** Therefore, by calling himself **“the first and the last”** in John’s vision, Jesus opens his revelation to John by announcing his deity. In the language of today, we would understand Jesus as saying, **“I am the A to Z of life – I always have been, I am now, and I always will be the eternal Son of God.”** Implicit within this self-designation of Jesus as the first and the last is contained the promise that this eternal Son of God will be with us every day of our lives as written in **Deuteronomy 31:6** – **“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them (enemies of Israel), for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”** God is always with us – in every circumstance, He is there. What a strong antidote against fear!

II. JESUS SAID, “I AM THE LIVING ONE; I WAS DEAD, AND BEHOLD I AM ALIVE FOR EVER AND EVER!”

This is the message of Easter. Jesus himself had said in **John 14:19** – **“Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.”** The early

Christians recognized Jesus' resurrection from the dead as **the first installment of a future resurrection** that would ultimately include them and all believers. Thus, by rising from the dead, Jesus guaranteed eternal life to all his followers, even if they faced death for his name. This wonderful truth includes us too, living some 20 + centuries after Christ. Jesus, the Living One, has ripped the stinger off death, giving us a future that's secure. One of these days you and I are going to die. That's reality. That's what being a sinner has earned us. You and I have earned physical death through our own sin. But as we learned moments ago, the second part of **Romans 6:23** says, ***"but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."*** Unlike a wage, a gift is something that you did not earn, something you cannot earn. A gift is freely given out of love. **The gift of God given freely out of His love is eternal life, which by the way means not just unending life, but an enduring quality of life in the presence of Christ.** In **John 10:28**, Jesus says, ***"I give my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."*** The same nail-scarred hand that reached out to comfort John in his vision, the powerful right hand of the Son of Man, is the hand in which your eternal future securely rests. It is the same loving hand that will hold you when you die. It is the loving hands of our Savior that will hand-deliver you to heaven, a place prepared for his own, where there is no reason to be afraid.

III. JESUS SAID, "I HOLD THE KEYS OF DEATH AND HADES.

The resurrection of Jesus means that there are no enemies left standing who can ultimately thwart God's Kingdom. Jesus has

conquered them all. What did Jesus mean when he said, ***“I hold the keys of death and Hades”***?

The resurrection of Jesus spelled victory over sin, death, and the devil. They may kick up their heels now and again, but ultimately they are vanquished foes. Jesus is in control. **He holds the keys.** Whoever holds the keys has power, ownership, and authority over whatever it is that the keys open. For example, the car dealership doesn't give you the keys to your new car until the financing has been arranged. The same with buying a house; the realtor hands you the keys at closing after you've signed the mortgage papers. In the Kingdom sense, because of Jesus' death and resurrection, He holds the keys. He signed on the dotted line with his own precious blood. What did He buy? He purchased your life and mine – that's what it means to be redeemed – to be bought back at a price.

What do keys do? They have two different functions. Keys either **lock** things up, or **unlock** something that was sealed shut. Because of His death and resurrection, Jesus now has the authority to lock up in Hell, for all eternity, the devil, his evil angels, and those who rejected Him by refusing His gracious gift. On the flip side, he also has the power and authority to unlock the doors of heaven and throw them open to receive those who have trusted that their sins have been washed away by Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

How can we be sure this is for us? How do we know we are truly forgiven? In the words of our text – ***“Don't be afraid.”*** There

are numerous Scriptural references to which we could turn for this assurance. One of my favorites is **John 5:24** –

“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”

Many a dying Christian has pillowed his head on that promise. So can we. Do not be afraid.

CONCLUSION

So whenever the troubles of this life creep in around you, don't give place to fear. Instead call on the Lord for the strength to beat back the fear. In **February of 2013**, just a little over 6 years ago, I had surgery to remove my prostate gland, after being diagnosed with a medium grade cancer. It had been decided that during the surgery, besides removing the prostate, my surgeon would also remove 12 lymph nodes for biopsy to determine if the cancer had spread. Several days later, in fact it was a Sunday morning, because I remember being home alone while Martha was at church, I received the pathology report on “My Chart. The report said that one out of the twelve lymph nodes appeared **“abnormal.”** I'm not going to lie, that one word freaked me out. It was several more days before the surgeon contacted me by telephone. During those days, I remember beating back the fear that kept gnawing at the edges of my consciousness, seeking a way to enter in. What did the word **“abnormal”** mean anyway? When the surgeon finally did call, he didn't exactly put my fear to rest. ***“It could be nothing but it could be something,*** he said. ***“We'll have to monitor the situation.”*** Jesus' words were indeed for me during those days. – **“Do not be afraid.”** They were words of admonition coupled with the grace of His promise. **“Your**

security is in the death and resurrection of Christ.” Each of us are going through our own kinds of uncertainties today. Do not be afraid. Jesus died and rose for me and for you. **A-men.**