

Sermon to the Saints which are at Topeka, Kansas -- Sunday, August 23, 2026

“And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, **Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.**” (Revelation 1:17-20)

About a year and ten months ago, I last delivered a sermon on the book of the Revelation, as part of the series regarding a passage-by-passage examination of John’s great treatise on the Day of the Lord. In that sermon, I was working on the scene of Christ walking amidst His seven churches – church of seven or completion – with the elders of that body held in His right hand. As I did so, the work joyfully required some cross referencing to the scene of the prophet Daniel in his final vision in chapters 10-12. The Holy Ghost enlightened my spirit some regarding that vision. Since I had previously searched out Daniel’s other visions, but stalled out on the complexity of the final one, I was pleased to lean into the new light on the matter. So I spent these intervening months on 11 sermons to open up the words of that final vision. Having completed that detour, it is now time to return to this work of John and pick up where we left off.

By way of setting our context, this scene of Christ – that introduces the author of the seven letters to the churches ***“which are in Asia” (Revelation 1:11)*** – was being examined in three particulars:

1. The intimate association between Jesus Christ and the Church
2. The disposition of Jesus Christ in the vision
3. The promises of Jesus Christ in the vision

I closed my November 2024 sermon indicating that we were ready to *“consider the promises Christ makes to the Bride in this vision”*. Now we can turn to that wonderful work, Lord willing. As I begin, I pretty quickly need to clarify what I intend by saying *“the promises of Jesus Christ”*. I do not intend “promise” in the sense that Christ declares that He will give a gift or that something will happen – as that term is frequently utilized. He certainly makes such declarations in each of his seven letters to the churches.

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” (Revelation 2:7)

“He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.” (Revelation 2:11)

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.” (Revelation 2:17)

“And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star.”

(Revelation 2:26-28)

“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.” (Revelation 3:5)

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.” (Revelation 3:12)

“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” (Revelation 3:21)

Rather, I use the term in the sense that Christ provides express assurances upon which His saints may base expectations. Indeed, the expectations of the saints that the promises I just outlined will come to pass are grounded in these very assurances. That is why you will find that Christ's characteristics in John's vision here are revisited in introducing Christ in each of these seven letters. For example, the first letter to the church at Ephesus introduces the author with ***“These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks”*** (Revelation 2:1). Of course, this is straight out of John's vision in Revelation 1:16, ***“he had in his right hand seven stars”***. The promises or assurances made by Christ in this vision include:

1. ***“I am the first and the last”***
2. ***“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore”***
3. ***“[I] have the keys of hell and of death”***

“I am the first and the last”. In simple terms, as expositor Seiss expresses it, *“it is plainly intended to express what appertains exclusively to the divine and the eternal [I]. It is not a mere statement of the extent of Christ's humiliation, from the estate of one first in honour to the estate of one lowest in disgrace; but a formula which sets forth the eternity of God, and his high superiority to all created things.”* I think this is a solid summary, so let us explore that a bit more.

“I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour. I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God. Yea, before the day was I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?” (Isaiah 43:11-13)

It may seem – indeed, it all too frequently seems to me – that there is no recovery from our gross errors in life ... our grossly sinful nature. Of course his majesty the devil – ***“the accuser of our brethren” (Revelation 12:10)*** – is most keen for those errors to reside in us to gouge and fret our spirits. The term *“devil”* translates to *“a slanderous accuser”*, and as our friend Ben recently pointed out, *“Satan is a very wily character. He is smarter than you. More diligent than you. More experienced than you. More patient than you. More devious than you. More relentless than you. He’s there to play the long game – he’ll engage in tactical retreats, for example, only so he can attack you in another way after you’ve let your guard down.”* So the enemy is strong and we are inherently weak. It is a condition in the fall of the creation that we have increased weakness as the spoliations of sin rot from the core.

“Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.” (1 Peter 3:7)

And as the body of Christ’s saints, we have an additional element of weakness that is relevant to this scene being laid out for John. We are the Bride. We are the wife in the antetype of the passage above. Christ – as the antetype of the husband – demonstrates how to dwell with His Bride the Church ***“according to knowledge”***. His knowledge of us. Of our nature, as ***“the weaker vessel”***. This same Bride is who this same Christ is walking amongst in John’s vision. She is at war with His enemies and – sadly – with herself! In one metaphor, she is preparing to meet her Betrothed and go to her wedding and marriage supper, so she needs to be getting herself prepared. In another metaphor, she is in active labor to deliver a man child while Satan rages in her face seeking to devour that manchild when he is born (Revelation 12). The weakest and apparently most unprotected creature up against the most vile and menacing monster. That is the church.

What is the remedy? Here, both in the passage from Revelation chapter one and the passage from Isaiah chapter 43, we are given to see the order of things. The sequence of things. By that mechanism, we are able to see who relies upon whom for existence. Seen properly, this provides a flood of relief. Seen incompletely – or blasphemously – it is lukewarm comfort. So, my friends, let us see it comprehensively.

“¶ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” (John 1:1-3)

The word *“Primogenitor”* is a good way to anchor this concept – though that word is utilized to reference ancestry in human affairs. It strictly means *“first father”*, which is what Christ is declaring Himself to be. Except that He was – nothing else would be. Before you had grief and sorrow, He was. Before there was a generation that included you, He was. Before there was a fall into sin and darkness, He was. Before there was a race of human beings, He was. Before there was a race of angels – including their glorious estate from which Satan and his demons fell – He was. Before there was a creation constructed – even beyond the far reaches of the currently-

known universe – He was. He predates and precedes and holds all glory for all of it. What logical – much less spiritual – bases could exist to conclude that anything comes except by Him? He is **“the first”**.

“¶ Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.” (Job 19:23-27)

This passage is one of very few about which I would report that it has followed me through all of my conscious years. It is a profession of faith in Christ – by a man who had no natural basis on which to know of Him. A heathen in a heathen land – naturally estranged from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. A descendant of Esau, dwelling in that vastly darkened period of time when the children of Israel were in captivity in Egypt. He was in old Edom – on the other side of the Sinai Peninsula. But God was with him. Christ – **“my redeemer”** – was with him. Within this profession of faith in Christ, he makes a statement that bears on our current passage quite conclusively: **“he [Christ] shall stand at the latter [day] upon the earth”**. The word **“day”** is interpolated, indicating that it is not in the original text. Christ shall stand on the earth **“at the latter”**. This expressive clause is one Hebrew word **“acharown”** (**“akh-ar-one”**), and intends **“behind, following, subsequent”**. It is used in scripture as **“end, utmost, following, hinder, hindermost, hindmost, rereward, uttermost”**. It is expressive of the time after all other time. It is expressive of the very last in the order of all things sequential. In Daniel seven, describing the perpetuity of Christ’s kingdom, it declares:

“And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:14)

Because of the way we twist and torture words in the generations of men, it is a fair wonder if the English language can express the concept with sufficient certainty. What John is being told in the most efficient use of words is that if the uncreate existence had the capacity to end, the very last entity that would exist is Christ. All other things fall. All other things fail. More immediately, it needs to be comfortably understood that among all things that humans will have the capacity to experience – Christ will be still governor of all, creator of all, sustainer of all. He is **“the last”**.

One final point I feel is valuable in examining this assurance from Christ that he is **“the first and the last”**. He, being God manifested in the flesh, possesses the eternity of God. So, when Isaiah prophetically declares of God **“thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity” (Isaiah 57:15)**, it is as much a description of Christ as it is of the Father. Christ inhabits eternity. Christ declares **“the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done” (Isaiah 46:10)** because He inhabits it all presently – present tense. So we should not simply understand that Christ was at the beginning, and he will be at the end – but that from the beginning to the end all things and times are inhabited and governed by Christ. So comprehensive

is His ownership and management of the creation, it is impossible for a thing to occur to, with, for, by, or about the saints and the Church that is not presently in the hand of Christ. He is the first and the last and all things in the compass of time and providence between. There is nothing that the saints – who make up this final body of the Bride of Christ – will or can face that is outside of their Husband’s capacity to direct. So, when Christ declares “**fear not**”, because “**I am the first and the last**”, there is true assurance ... true promise ... that resolves fear in the tender heart.

“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore”

John previously testified of Christ “**the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us**” (John 1:14). He further testified of his hearing the dialog between Christ and the Jewish leadership of His day where He declared “**Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up**” (John 2:19), regarding which he clearly understood Christ “**spake of the temple of his body.**” (John 2:21). John knew the Savior was made in the likeness of men and came to be sacrificed for the sins of His elect people. He knew that upon the fulfillment of the covenant, Christ was returned to life, and he witnessed His ascension to glory. So is this statement of assurance from Christ, a mere recitation of this known truth – for another confirmation of the matter? What does this utterance provide in the way of an assurance to John – and by proper extension, the saints who will see His Day?

Expositor Trapp rephrases it as though Christ declared: “*[I am] the living God, who had life in myself, and gave life to the world, but assumed the human nature, and was made man, and in that nature died; but I rose again from the dead, and shall die no more, but ever live to make intercession for my people.*” These are truly comforting words, because without the life, death, burial and resurrection of the sinless Redeemer, there is no proper sacrifice for our sins.

In the letter written to the church in Smyrna, these two assurances are combined: “**These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive**” (Revelation 2:8), suggesting an association between them at least in the application of comforts to the saints. Smyrna is the church for whom Christ has only words of praise, sympathy and encouragement; no criticism. The little church is heavily oppressed by circumstances and the enemies of Christ, and they have not waived. I think it is instructive to see the correlation between the assurances and the circumstances.

“For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself ... [and] to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel [that is, His promise], confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus”. (Hebrews 6:13, 17-20)

When Jesus Christ completed His time in this earth and ***“became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8)***, he did so as a human. He lived the life of a human. He died as a human. Now He is alive for evermore as a human. There is a man in glory. He went there as our forerunner – as a human. Yes, as one with God the Father and the Holy Ghost, he indeed has always had life. In that capacity He is life. But the passage is referencing his having life as a human, facing death as a human, and living again forever as a glorified human. Taking on that glorified form, and preparing the mansions in glory in His Father’s house, where we may follow on. This is an assurance that sustains us as humans who are facing the rages of Satan and his demonic and human agents, while we also face the wars in our sinful and doomed flesh. Amen.

“[I] have the keys of hell and of death”.

Remember, please, that the words we are now considering are at the close of the introduction to the Day of the Lord. These are part of the last words of Christ before he engages the work that will prepare His Bride so that she is ready for the Day of the Lord to open. When the Day of the Lord opens – with the stage set in heaven and earth – the seals will begin to break open. Among that array of God’s works, we see this mighty enemy of man furiously swagger across the earth:

“I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.” (Revelation 6:8)

Then, like the providential Magnum Opus of Jesus Christ, events will build across this globe and in the heavens above until Christ is established as the king of Kings and lord of Lords in His earthly throne. Then, the book tells us cryptically of His millennial reign. When that is finished, we see the truly final disposition of the race of men and the return of the original state in which this earth and creation was established. At that hour, we see a simple act declaring things finally and fully reset.

“And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:14)

When Paul is discussing the conclusion of the things of and for this creation, his words are typically discussed as they respect the resurrection of the body from the dead – a glorious work to anticipate indeed. But he says much, much more. He, like John in this Revelation, extends things past the millennial reign of that Christ and the resurrection of the saints in glory.

“¶ But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must [have His millennial] reign, till he hath put all

enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." (1 Corinthians 15:20-26)

Death and Hell. The separation of this body from the eternally-culpable spirit and the residence that collects those who have been separated and await the final judgment without the intervention of Christ. Seiss colorfully expresses the analysis: *"It is hardly possible that the Saviour meant to represent death as a place. It is, however, a power, and a fearful power, locking up and holding tight all who come under its sway. What millions have gone down beneath that power, and are now held by it! Every acre of the earth is full of them, and the bottom of every sea. [] Even on the life-powers of the Son of God were these manacles made fast. But by him they were also opened: for he hath the keys of death. And as death holds the bodies of men, so hades holds their souls. There is an under world, intermediate between death and the resurrection, and the souls of all the dead are in that world, the good in rest and hope, and the wicked in unrest and fearful awaiting of judgment. [] It was into this "hell" that the soul of Christ descended when he expired, and where it would be retained till now, had he not been master of the keys, by which he opened its gates, and came forth to make this glorious declaration to his people."*

Since ***"as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (Romans 5:12)*** this terrifying power of death and hell has infused a fear into our flesh. Job, a man who our God declared by God to be ***"perfect and upright, [] that feared God, and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1)***, was not immune to the dreadful specter of that power grasping at his flesh, to wit:

"Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death; A land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness." (Job 10:21-22)

So we should not pretend that we remain immune to the influences of that power, particularly when our God chooses to hide His face from us and leave us for a period (it seems) to be pursued quite comprehensively by its malignant prospects. But the assurance – provided by Christ, to the little body of believers He prepares for the return of the King – is that this dreadful jurisdiction does not reach as far as men fear. There is an ultimate Keeper of that prison. There is One who decides when the door will be closed and locked, and when it will be opened to allow another to go in. It is not my desire – nor, I suspect, the desire of those here – to ever enter into the darkness of death or the terrors of that hell. This is a very weighty subject, once it settles upon any individual. And if we are of that little band ***"which are alive and remain" (1 Thessalonians 4:17)***, at the hour of His second advent, we will not see death. And that truth may be a component of what Christ is intimating to that Church of Revelation in this assurance.

"Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death?" (Job 38:17)

I think this dialog – from God to His servant Job – opens the issue in the most effectual light. Job, having been pressed to a human extreme and in that state uttered what is called in this passage ***"words without knowledge" (Job 38:1)***, is being challenged on this weighty point. Joseph Caryl,

in his lengthy examination of these words from God to Job, brings us forward to Christ's assurance to His Bride: *"It is the royal privilege of Jesus Christ, to be key-keeper of the grave (Rev. 1:18) I have the keys of hell and of death; that is, I have power to deliver over to, and to deliver or keep from both hell and death. The keys are an emblem of power and authority. Stewards have the keys. He that hath the keys of death, can deliver from death."*

There is a day appointed, when death and hell are cast into the lake of fire, to restore the human creation to the condition where sin and death no longer rest upon the race. Until that day comes, those who are in the battle will wrestle with the question and experience at least the specter of facing that darkness. In fact, though, it is our Redeemer and Friend and Husband who holds the keys to that place of hopeless darkness and misery. He has promised that ***"Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54) ... that "mortality might be swallowed up of life" (2 Corinthians 5:4).*** What could be more assuring to the body of His saints – on the precipice of the greatest period of spiritual and physical conflict to face the Church – than that He who has determined to ***"rejoice over them to do them good" (Jeremiah 32:41)*** holds the keys?

So, having come to the close of the first chapter of this Apocalypse, we see our Christ in the presence of His Bride to counsel and purge her to make her ready for His return. Though His judgment will begin with her – purging her of doctrinal and practical impurity – He brings forth assurances of His eternal affection for her and his unmatched capacity to carry her through every trial and secure every member of that body in the inheritance that was purchased with His blood.

These words – though they are only a starting point for your continued edification on the subject – should help us be prepared to open the love letters that Christ sends forth to His Bride. Lord willing. The work of affectionately cleansing her is a spiritual process that is secured only for ***"he that hath an ear" (Revelation 2:7).*** There is simply no capacity to hear any of it as long as we are consuming it through the strength, wisdom, or any ability of the flesh. So my prayer is that the Lord will cause our hearts to burn within us, as we walk with Him in that way.

I love you all. Amen.