

Rev. Seth D. Bode †† Sermon 476, 04-24-2022 †† Easter 2

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

Revelation 1:17-18

When I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead man. He placed his right hand on me and said, “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last— the Living One. I was dead and, see, I am alive forever and ever! I also hold the keys of death and hell.”



I had a friend once named Zac. Zac loved keys. He was related to a maintenance man at the school where my dad taught, and Zac somehow had keys to nearly every room in that school. Zac had been in every hidden room. Zac knew what it was like behind closed doors. So Zac had a great deal of friends.

The Lord Jesus invites you into His Word of truth today, and so He calls you His friends. Not only that, but the Lord Jesus gives you the way forward in your relationships, because He lives; and He lives to give you the keys to heaven and hell. This really comes down to relationships and how to treat one another.

But it starts with Easter victory.

THE ABCs OF THE PUBLIC KEYS

Like every reading today, this text starts with a break-in. Like every reading today, the break-in doesn't actually break anything. Instead, it proves a victory. John is in exile on Patmos, a small, desolate island near Ephesus, under emperor Domitian in the 90s, nearly 50 years after Jesus Christ appeared to the

disciples in that locked room. Now, the “*Lord and God*” of Thomas, and of all believers, ‘keys into’ John’s quarters of exile on Patmos.

Jesus comes to John with titles, like in a boxing match. You know how they always introduce boxers “in this corner,” with all their titles? He holds the victory in so many ways. He is the Faithful Witness, the All-Wise Teacher who still teaches through the public ministry. He is the Firstborn from the Dead, the preeminent reason why all resurrections to eternal life can and do work. He is the Ruler of the Kingdoms of the earth, the King of any kind of king you can think of, and Lord of any kind of dominion you might suggest. So with three titles, He is Prophet, Priest and King when all other prophets, priests, and kings were corrupt and incapable of measuring up. Another title: He is like a “Son of Man.” This emphasizes His humanity, but moreover His accession to the throne in His glorious exalted state.

He also holds the keys. He did not just defeat death and slam the door on hell, but He came back with the prison key.

This explains, in part, why Jesus appears the way He does to John, in such dignity and authority. Jesus has white hair to show His holiness and agelessness. Jesus has blazing eyes to show the scrutiny and wisdom of a great leader. He has bronze feet, showing strength that makes His enemies a footstool. He has a voice like rushing waters, for it carries power and performs what He speaks. His face shone like the sun as it did on transfiguration. He has priestly garments of a long robe and gold sash, showing dignity and authority. Priests minister among lampstands, but the lampstands here are the churches. There are seven of them, and seven stars in His right hand, a number indicating God’s gracious dealing with people on earth. Jesus is in charge of the ministry of the Word in His Church.

Keys and titles—two things that prove victory. This is the gospel that Jesus shares, so much victory.

Jesus doesn’t hold titles and keys just so He can break in and brag about His victory. He puts His titles and keys to good use.

He even gives us titles. John says Jesus considered us “*beloved*,” for Jesus loved us and freed us from our sins. He did this by His own blood. What love! That Jesus would use His own blood as the cleaning agent for the deep stains of

sin on our souls. John says that, because of Jesus, we are properly called a “*kingdom*.” We have a special nation of grace and we hold citizenship cards by faith alone.

Finally, He calls us “*priests to God His Father*.” In doing so, John reminds us that Jesus has even given us (not just titles, but) the keys. Once the mayor gives away the key to the city, nothing in the city is off-limits to the honored recipient. There are no secrets. The recipient has access everywhere and is trusted completely.

So we have access into His court in prayers for ourselves and for others. Priests are appointed; they can't take that privilege on themselves. Priests have access to God; they offer sacrifices which God accepts. Protection, providence, forgiveness, the right to approach God in prayer, eternal life, freedom to serve God, freedom from fear. What a royal house of kings! We are here for the spread of His Word, and for the powerful prayers.

These titles and keys help us navigate our relationships. We wouldn't know the first thing about having relationships with other people if we didn't have Jesus. With the keys Jesus has given us, we can unlock our futures. We can skip to the end of time, for if our status is “*forgiven*” in Jesus, then our future is with the Lord forever.

So Jesus can teach us the ABCs of our relationships, because He has mastered the Word of forgiveness. He knows it backwards and forwards. He is the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last. He is now the Living One!

- If it seems difficult to imagine what went wrong in your relationships;
- If life is hard right now because you're not sure whether someone is in your future;
- If you need to know where you stand with someone important;

Trust that Jesus, your risen Lord and God, is straight-up with you and straight-forward with your eternal soul. He is your most important relationship. He knows your worst mistakes in life, your sins, and He took them away and died for them. He didn't go to the grave and hell for nothing! But He knew where to take those sins and leave them.

When John was overwhelmed by Jesus' brightness, Jesus touched John. It wasn't just a vision! Like our gospel, Jesus proves He is there bodily, literally. Jesus touched John with His right hand, which Jesus uses to hold the seven stars or pastors of the churches. This is Jesus using His power and victory to soothe and console His beloved priests, His people. And He reminded John who holds the keys.

If you aren't always sure whether you have read a situation right and did the right kind of forgiving, you can trust that Jesus still holds the keys of victory. You can also trust that all real forgiveness is only through Jesus, the Living One. You can know that Jesus, the Alpha and Omega, will guide you through the next rough patch with that person on your mind, for He won Easter victory so that He might give it to you; in Jesus' name, Amen.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.