

The Door to Hades is Open – Praise Jesus!

2nd Sun. of Easter – 04/27/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Revelation 1:4-18 Pastor Keith Besel

vv. 17-18, [John says of Jesus,] **“But He laid His right hand upon me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, I am the first and the last, and the Living One. I became dead, and behold I am living into the eternity of eternities, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.’”**

Introduction

✘ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

✘ Only about 50 years before Jesus’ death and resurrection, the Roman poet, Virgil wrote an epic 12-book poem called the “Aeneid”. And in that poem Virgil said, “Easy is the descent into the underworld; the door to the underworld’s god (‘Hades’ in Greek mythology) is open day and night; but to retrace one’s steps and escape back to the upper air, this is the work; here is the toil.”

➔ Now, what did Virgil mean by that reference to the door to Hades, which is simply “the place of the dead?” It’s this: Entering death is easy – everyone does it, but finding your way back to the world of the living, that is hard; virtually impossible.

I. We all die in our sin.

✘ Virgil was right. No one in the human race escapes death; no one is exempt, because we all are steeped to the core in our sinful nature. In fact, Paul speaks to our nature from birth in Ephesians 2:1-3 when he says, “You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world...among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

➔ This is exactly what Jesus Himself says here in the book of Revelation when He says to the Christians in Sardis in chapter 3:1, “I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive,” (in the eyes of this world) “but you are dead” (before God because of your sinful ways).

✘ Just as the poet Virgil said, that’s the “easy” road; the “easy” thing to do, because that’s where our nature as humans leads us. Jesus Himself warns us in Mark 7:21-23 about the deep-seated desires inside of us all. “For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

➔ And this sin inside of us all, left unaddressed, brings eternal separation from God. Back to Paul again in Ephesians 2:12, he pulls no punches about the truth of our sinful status when we remove ourselves from Christ. He says, “...you were...separated from Christ, alienated...and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

✘ So, sin equals death; that’s the brutal truth; the deadly equation that none of us can deny.

➔ In fact, that equation even had its way with Jesus, didn’t it? Not because Jesus sinned Himself; no, He lived on earth in absolute perfection. But when Jesus went to the cross, 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us, “For our sake, [God] made Him (Jesus) to be sin, who knew no sin...”.

➔ That’s why, as we heard on Good Friday, Jesus cried out, enduring the full agony of separation from His Father, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mt. 27:46), because at that moment, Jesus embodied every single sin committed by all mankind throughout all of history.

- ✘ And the result? Just as Jesus says in verse 18 of our text, “I became dead.” He said, “It is finished,” and He “gave up His spirit” (Jn. 19:30), and He entered through the door into “Hades”, which in the Greek simply means, “the place of the dead,” or “the grave”. God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, was buried in a tomb; the place where every sinful soul deserves to be.

II. “I am...the Living One” (vv.17-18)

- ✘ Now, I know, that’s not very encouraging to hear that truth; that judgment. But that’s where things would have ended for every single soul on this planet if Jesus had been what sadly, the majority of the people in our world, think of Him – that He is just a man like all of the rest of us here in this room; nothing more than a liar and a fraud when He claimed to be the Son of God.

➔ In fact, people have often asked me – usually on, or around Easter, “Pastor, what would have happened if Jesus had not risen from the dead?” The answer is simple, “We would all spend eternity in hell,” because, just as Virgil said in his poem, “the way back to the world of the living” is not “virtually impossible” as he surmised. It is absolutely impossible according to Jesus Himself.

➔ When Jesus’ disciples asked Him in Matthew 19:25, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

- ✘ And now in our text today, Jesus says, “Do not be afraid, I am the first and the last, and the Living One” (vv. 17-18). Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

➔ How can He be “the Living One” if He truly did die with the sins of the entire world laid upon Him? Well, “with God all things are possible.” He is the very author of life itself; the only one that can create life out of nothing; out of what is dead and lifeless! So, just as verse five says, Jesus is “the firstborn of the dead.”

➔ That means that His resurrection is the first one in the sense that it is the source of all other resurrections to come. Jesus’ resurrection literally “births” every resurrection after it. When He burst physically from the tomb on Easter morning, Jesus gave “birth” to eternal life for you; for me and for all who believe only in Him as our Savior from sin, and our only way out of eternity in hell as we deserve! That’s no exaggeration friends. Coming back from death is impossible without Jesus. In John 14:6, He said, “No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

- ✘ So, how does all of this work? Well, in verse five today we are told first of all that Jesus “has freed us from our sins by His blood.”

➔ Just as that verse indicates, our sin literally locks us in behind the impenetrable door of death. It is the prison that our guilt deserves thousands of times over; one eternal life sentence of eternal death for every single sin we commit in our thoughts, words and deeds.

➔ But as John 1:7 says, “...the blood of Jesus, [God’s] Son cleanses us from all sin!” From “all” sin. He “has freed us from our sins by His blood.”

- ✘ And only Jesus can do that, no one else. Why? because, as Jesus says in verse 18, “behold I am living into the eternity of eternities, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.” Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

➔ That prison door; that grave for you and me, and all of our loved ones that we have already buried who have faith in Jesus as the only Savior from sin ... that door of Death and Hades that is impossible for us humans to climb up out of, is standing wide open now because Jesus has conquered it!

➔ Jesus told Peter before His death that this would be the way to eternal life for all who would make the same clear confession of faith that Peter made, saying that Jesus is “the Christ, the

Son of the living God.” Jesus told him, “...the gates of Hades will not prevail against [this true confession of My Church]” (Mt. 16:18).

➔ You see, those are the “keys” that open death’s prison door; 1) the blood of Jesus that pays for our guilt, and 2) the true confession of faith; that Jesus is the promised Christ and the Son of the living God.

Conclusion

✘ So the vital point to all of this, as Jesus shows us here today, is that we focus now on Him as “the Living One” (v.17).

➔ The temptation from Satan, and from the world and from within ourselves is to focus on our “deadness”; on our faults and sins, which make us no different than John was in verse 17 when, as soon as he saw Jesus, he says, “I fell at His feet as though dead.”

➔ Now, don’t get me wrong, I’m not saying we should ignore the very real truth that our sins bring death upon us all.

✘ But that is not Jesus’ intent for us now. It is not why He rose from death; not why the doors of death stand wide open for His believers; not why He stands there with His arms open and ready to embrace us as His “kingdom” of “priests” as verse six promises.

➔ No, as soon as we confess and acknowledge the depth of our sin before God, then we must in faith recognize that Jesus – just as He did with John, so He has “laid His right hand upon me” as well!

➔ Jesus’ “right hand” in Scripture is always His Gospel hand; His forgiving, saving and life-giving hand.

✘ Yes, He “became dead.” But Jesus conquered death as only He could do as the living Son of God. And in doing that He not only “has the keys to Death and Hades”, but as He said in John 10:9-10, “I am the door. If anyone enters (into life) by Me, he will be saved... I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

➔ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.*