

The Seven Martyrs of the Apocalypse: The Living One(s) Revelation 3:14-22

Introduction

Today we finish our meditations on the letters of Jesus to the seven churches in ancient Turkey.

If you're our guest for Easter, you might be thinking, "wait a second, we didn't read from Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Why on earth are we reading from this weird book of Revelation on Easter Sunday?"

I have never heard an Easter sermon out of this strange last book of the Bible, either. But this is definitely an Easter story!

How--in 2019--could the resurrection of Jesus 2000 years ago have any kind of real impact on our lives today? This story can answer that question in stunning and deeply relevant ways.

First, we'll see that Jesus is the Living One. Then we'll hear that we can be living ones too. Finally, we'll ask---what do living ones do?

1. Jesus is the Living One
2. We can be too
3. What living ones do

1. Jesus is the Living One

In our story, John, imprisoned on an island, hears someone speak. He turns around. Spoiler: It's Jesus. But he doesn't say (12) right away that it's Jesus. Instead, he paints with words a picture of this person who surprised him.

If we got out pencil and paper, and we tried to draw this picture of this person based on John's description, it would be more surreal and bizarre than the most surreal modern art. But that's not our goal. Instead, these words and depictions should wash over us, till we ourselves have a startling encounter with this dazzling, strange person, like John himself did.

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Are you ready?

First, this person is pictured as a wise elder (14). Jesus, of course, was young when he died on the cross. But after his resurrection, he gets himself a nice gray crown of hair--and all the respect that goes with his old-man wisdom.

Since I'm getting gray--this is pretty cool. If you've imagined your own resurrection, you've probably imagined the youthful bodies you hope to receive. But Jesus is raised, and he shows up wearing a gray crown of wisdom! And so one thing that "Happy Easter" means is: finally, someone who's wise is in charge!

Second, this person, John says (13), has got a golden sash around his chest. Servants in the first century wore sashes around their waists. Wealthy ruling-class people wore long robes with sashes across their chests. Jesus came first as a servant. But now he shows up, long robe, chest sash, raised from the dead and wealthy, dignified, and clearly in power.

What else?

His eyes are like fire (14). So in his wisdom and authority, he can make deep, piercing judgments. You're not going to fool this man.

When he speaks, it's as commanding as a trumpet blast (10) and as sharp as a sword (16).

And what does he say with this trumpet voice and sword mouth?

He says, of course, that he is alive. So alive that the title on his his business card is "The Living One" (18). He's not just a normal living one. We're alive, after all. But Jesus sums up Easter for us, doesn't he? "I was dead, and look! I am alive for ever and ever!"

You and I live, but we live with death chasing us from behind. And sooner or later it will catch up with each of us. God came to us in Jesus, and the immortal One took a life and body like ours. The Father watched his only Son walk through his life with death chasing him, and catching him that first Good Friday. But now Jesus comes to us as the never-gonna-die-again One. So when he says, "John, don't be afraid (17), Christians, don't be afraid. Church, don't be afraid," he blasts these words from the

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trumpet of his mouth, from across the boundary of death, from the other side of the grave! Can you hear it?

Then the coolest part: he jingles his keys in front of John, and says “I hold the keys of death and Hades” (18).

The Greeks thought maybe Pluto, maybe Hecate, maybe some other god held the keys of death. But Jesus says: “look who’s got the keys.” Death, once his own enemy, has now become his servant.

And this is where we need to turn to our second point. It’s not just that Jesus is the Living One. It’s that we can be too.

2. We can be too

When Jesus jingles his keys, he’s doing two things at the same time. First, he’s mocking death and the wicked forces that used to hold death’s keys. Paul says (Col 2:15) that Jesus made a public mockery of the powers of death by defeating death in his own death. John Owen calls this “the death of death in the death of Christ!” He stole the keys of death right out of their hands and jingles them in front of their faces!

John Donne’s sonnet from 400 years ago: “Death, be not proud. Though some have called thee mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so. Death, thou shalt die!”

But when WE hear his keys jingling from across the barrier of death, jingling in the hands of the one who died but now lives forever, the message is a little different.

There’s a little picture of it in verse 17. John looks at Jesus. He falls at his feet like he’s dead. Jesus comes over, puts his hand on him, and (18) jingles his keys. A little 10-centimeter painting of our own death and resurrection in Jesus!

The same jingling keys that mock the forces of darkness fill us with hope!

Did you know that while the NT talks frankly about death all the time, not once in the NT, following the resurrection of Jesus, does it ever say that a Christian believer has “died.” Instead, it says that a Christian has gone to sleep. Remember when the little girl died, and Jesus told the people who were weeping to be quiet---that she was not dead,

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but only sleeping, and they laughed at him? And then he went into her room and said “little girl, it’s time time wake up”? Right there is the perfect picture of Jesus, the Living One, holding the keys of death in his hands.

The world tries to pretend that death is no big deal, but the world has no idea who’s holding death’s keys. But if you belong to Christ Jesus, you know who has the keys.

Do you want to be able to look your own death in the face one day, and, even while you’re dying, hear the keys jingling in the hand of the Resurrected and Living One on the other side of death? Then take a look at the Living One today. Listen to those keys jingle. Can you hear them?

So, Jesus is the Living One. We can be too. And one final thing. What do living ones do?

3. What Living Ones Do

The New Testament is full of things that Living Ones---alive in Jesus--- do. Here’s just one.

When John starts telling his story, he says (10) “On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit.” John was separated from the Christians and churches he loved. Probably in prison on this island, Patmos. But he knew which day was Sunday. The very first Christians worshipped on Sundays because Sunday was Resurrection Day.

And so John was “In the Spirit”. One scholar says that “he was wide awake, and every avenue of his soul was wide open to ... God” (Hendrickson).

He joined in the worship of his church friends all over ancient Turkey. And you know what? Jesus revealed himself to John. Of course, Jesus came to John is such dazzling radiance that John though he was going to die!

That might freak you out.

But here’s the thing: maybe it’s an intense experience that overwhelms you. Maybe it’s a quiet, confident, sense of God’s peace that goes past anything you can understand. However you experience it, you and I need to be “in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day.” We

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need to know that it's Sunday, Resurrection Day. We need to hear and see those keys jingle in Jesus' resurrected hands again. We need to be able to face our lives and our deaths knowing who's got those keys.

In fact, we need this every day. We say that this is AD 2019. AD: Anno Domini: the Year of our Lord 2019. Every day on your calendar acknowledges the first Easter. Every day is Resurrection Day. And so every day is a chance to be "in the Spirit"---to open every avenue of your heart and life to the Living One. To be energized for whatever you've been called to do. To be empowered to love whomever you've been called to love. To be humbled to serve whomever you've been called to serve—by the Spirit of the Living One.

Why would you miss the chance to be in the Spirit on the Lord's Day alongside your fellow believers?

Why in the world would you face Tuesday, 23 April, AD 2019 apart from the Spirit of the Living One? Mondays already feel like death to a lot of us. Why not listen for the jingling keys of the Living One as you face it?

Conclusion

What have you been called to do?

Has the Lord called you to be a student right now? Before your studies frustrate you, and you think "what's the point!?"—get yourself in the Spirit of the Living One, who says "in me and my resurrection, none of your labor is in vain."

Has God given you a spouse to love and serve? Before you get stuck believing the lie that they're never going to change, and for that matter, neither are you, get yourself in the Spirit of the Resurrected One, the Changed One. And through his eyes of blazing fire see not just the person they are now, but the person that they are meant to be, the person they are becoming, the resurrected, glorious version of themselves that they will soon be in Jesus. And then make yourself an instrument in the Living One's hands to help them come alive more and more!

Are you a parent, or son, or daughter, or grandmother, or friend, or doctor, or banker, or lawyer, or teacher, or designer, or mentor, or butcher or baker or candlestick-

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maker? Are you hoping you have 40 or 50 or 60 years of life ahead of you? Are you toward the end of your race and hoping that the Lord calls you home soon? Then tomorrow, live not like it's just another Monday. Get in the Spirit and live like it's AD 2019. Let your whole life be marked by the reality of Jesus' resurrection. When it starts to feel like death, go ahead and look death right in the face. And as you do, listen for those keys jingling in the Living One's hand.

And say to death "you hear that jingle? You're no match for my Lord. In fact, the worst you can do to me is bring me through you, and into resurrection life."

And then, in the Spirit, walk on.

I'm going to say "The Lord is Risen!" and I'd like you to say "He is Risen Indeed! Hallelujah!"

Let us pray.