

Title: Alive Forevermore  
Text: Revelation 1.1-18  
Theme: The ultimate and eternal hope in Christ  
Occasion: Resurrection Day 2023  
Prop Stmtnt: Facing tribulation or death, you need the One who conquers all.

There is something a bit sad about a small funeral. The Hearst pulls up to the side of the grave, the funeral director and the back-hoe operator along with the one or two others struggle along with the minister to set the casket over the hole. "Is everyone here?" A few words, a few verses, a little prayer and the casket is lowered, the grave is filled in, and the people go on with the routine called life. What a shame we think, that no one else knew or no one else cared about this person. Yet, Christ did not even have a funeral. There wasn't time. The Sabbath was about to begin, and all work had to be done before 6p. So, as quickly as they could, the few friends and admirers that were left, did what they could to provide a decent burial. It wasn't what they wanted to do. They couldn't even prepare the body properly with spices and treatment to help minimize the inevitable affects of death and the harsh reality of decay that sets in so fast. A hasty burial was arranged. The body was wrapped by a small band of people choosing to be counted unclean and disqualified for some Sabbath observances so they could tend to this need. The procession to the tomb was short and without fanfare, unlike the monstrous extravaganza orchestrated for Herod's death. No songs were sung or formal prayers given that we know of. The amount of people at the grave was so small that only a handful even knew where he was buried. The stone was rolled into place, the few friends now attempted to return to their routine called life. But in 40 hours, it would be anything but routine. One of the early witnesses was John. It is now about 65 years later when John sees the resurrected Christ, again.

Read Text:

The book of Revelation is eternally relevant. But, while the prophecies in this book are fascinating, sobering, concerning and overwhelming, the heart and focal point of this final book in the Bible is the same heart and focal point of the entire Bible; Jesus. The apostle John is the human author. He is suffering. He has been exiled and banished to the isle of Patmos because he refuses to renounce his faith in Christ. He is writing this book to 7 local churches (v.4). The faithful believers in those churches are either in persecution or will face it. All will face death. John is an old man. His days are numbered. His death is fast approaching and he writes to believers who are facing or will face persecution because of their allegiance to Christ. Believers all over this world have identified with the message of this book. We are growing in our identity with them. In v.9 John says that he is your brother and partner in tribulation. But there is more. John does more than share in suffering, he shares in our kingdom. He shares in our hope. He shares in our future glory. He shares in our promise of eternal life because we share the same Savior and because our Savior is the king, we share in the same kingdom. It was a Sunday John said (v.10). I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. It was the first day of the week. It was resurrection day, but on this Lord's Day, the Lord showed up, and did he ever. His voice was a loud voice like a trumpet and John said that he commanded me to write what I see and put it in a book and send it to these seven churches. These seven churches were not only seven actual

churches in seven different cities, but these seven churches represent the various kinds of churches that existed then and from then until now. Jesus showed up because he had a mission for John. He was tasked with getting this book into the hands of each of these churches. These churches represented Christ. These churches were outposts of the kingdom of Christ. These churches were embassies for the real king and in many cases, they were doing a poor job. They were forgetting about Jesus. Whatever else you think about the book of Revelation you need to know this: Jesus is serious about his church. Therefore, the church must be serious about Jesus!

There were some who were followers in name only. They excused their sin, and were flippant about Jesus. Too many other distractions and other priorities crowded out what they had at one time claimed to believe. To these churches who had lost their first love, played fast and loose with the doctrine, winked at sin and failed to take seriously the call of the gospel, Christ gave them warnings. But to those who were faithful and facing persecution from the world, and facing persecution even from within the church because they were humbly and sincerely calling the people to authentic Christianity, Christ gave them this reminder. I know what you are going through. I know you. I see you. I am your King. I am your Savior. "I am the first and the last, the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever." When John turned to see him, John fell at his feet as though dead. On that day, John saw Christ as He is in his unveiled glory. The garment for which the soldiers gambled was replaced by a majestic robe that reached down to his feet, distinguished further by an impressive golden sash. His head and hair were white, like wool, like snow and his eyes like fire, and his face was like the sun. Did you know that it is estimated that the sun is losing weight by radiation at the rate of 4,200,000 tons per second?<sup>1</sup> You cannot be near power like that without being destroyed. The unveiled glory of Christ is a terrifying thing to behold. To those who reject him, his words will laser like a sword. But to those who love him, this awesome power and overwhelming presence protects, comforts and reassures. To this old believer who years ago rested his head against his chest, now trembling before him in fright over all this pure power and might, Christ reaches out with his right hand, the same one that held seven stars, and with that hand, places it on John and says: fear not. This command to fear not comes from the only one who has the authority to make that promise. In v.17 Jesus told John not to fear and he told him why he could tell John that. He said, I am the first and the last. I am the living one. I died and BEHOLD I am alive forevermore. And I have the keys of Death and Hades. These announcements by Christ in vs. 17-18 are what informs John's greeting to the seven churches in vs. 4-8. And this greeting has four parts: 1) A blessing/prayer (vs. 4-5a) 2) A doxology (expression of praise) (vs. 5b-6) 3) A promise of hope and judgment and 4) The Ultimate truth claim (v.8). The resurrection of Christ is all throughout this opening chapter, so it is a fitting text for such a glorious day because it takes the reality of the resurrection and helps us see why this part of the reason why we can receive grace from God, be at peace with God and not fear. In the blessing that John prays for the believers and in the doxology that states, John describes Jesus in 7 ways. I want to review 5 of these with you then specifically show you why grace and peace can be yours.

### **1. Jesus is the faithful witness (5a)**

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<sup>1</sup> John Philipps, Exploring Revelation, p. 29.

Jesus faithfully told the truth. This means that he is both accurate and authoritative. Luke records a very interesting event that happened on the afternoon and early evening of Resurrection Sunday. Two men, disciples of Christ, were on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They were struggling, to make sense of everything that had just happened, when Christ began to walk with them. Now, of all of the things that he could have been doing that afternoon, he chose to walk with two, rather unimportant guys. In fact, the guy is not even named, while the other guy is named Cleopas, and we now almost as much about the other guy as we do him. And here, on the afternoon that Christ came back to life, he spends several hours walking on the road with two guys! Of all the places to be, and of all the things that he could have been doing, he spends most of the day walking away from Jerusalem? I mean, it doesn't sound like he has even stopped in to see his mom! Think of what he could have done that day.

If I was handling his schedule that day, I wouldn't have let that opportunity slip by. Everybody knows that in marketing, it's all in the timing. Before you are yesterday's news, you need to capitalize on your moment of fame. After giving an interview at Golgotha, I would bring the reporters along for a few rather, in-your-face events. First of all, I would make sure Jesus crashed the Bar-mitzvah of one of the Pharisees' boys. Next, I would have had him stop by the temple to ask the chief priest about how the work is progressing on the repair of the curtain. Then we would visit a cemetery and ask the caretaker if he has had any success in finding the people who escaped from their graves. After that I would have dropped in on Pilate with some sleeping pills, called, "out of this world" as a gift for his wife guaranteed to reduce nightmares. And finally, I would have him stop at the Roman garrison and offer a thorny crown in exchange for a robe. The publicity opportunity was enormous, but instead, Christ spent the afternoon walking with these guys, and then sat down for a meal with them? Are you kidding me? Why did he take so much of his first day to do that? The entire story just reveals how much we don't think like Christ. The reason he spent so much of his time with just two guys that day was because that was the most important thing that he could have done. Whatever Christ, it was always the exact thing that he was supposed to do. And, what did Christ say to these guys? Luke reveals that on the road that day, Christ, beginning with Moses and all the Prophets showed them how the entire OT made it clear that he had to suffer these things and then enter glory. The faithful witness was faithfully teaching the Bible. For hours that day, he showed them that he was the focal point of the Bible. It was all about him. He was the seed that crushed the Serpent. He was the ark that rescued his people. He was the promise to Abraham, the offering that saved Isaac, and the Passover Lamb that freed his people from slavery. He was the glory cloud that protected the nation from Pharaoh's armies until they drowned in the sea, for the cloud that settled upon the tabernacle that dwelt in the midst of his people, was the same glory that tabernacled in the tent of a human body and dwelt among us. The Day of Atonement was fulfilled in Calvary. And the two angels that stood guard over the mercy seat where the law had to be annually satisfied by the shedding of blood in atonement for how it had been broken all pointed to the tomb where two angels stood guard over the place where the law had forever been atoned for by the once and eternally perfect sacrifice of the perfect lamb, and ultimate sacrifice. He was the son of David, the song of Solomon and the suffering servant in Isaiah. He was the stone that the builders rejected, the rock that crushed the kingdoms of the world and

the Son of Man. Everything in the law and prophets pointed to him. The events of the past few days were the fulfillment of hundreds of prophecies spoken hundreds of years before, preserved and proclaimed for this very day. Later that same day when he appeared to the disciples, he did the same thing. He pointed out from the OT scriptures that all that had happened had already been prophesied. They were eye-witnesses of his glory. They were participants in history. He is the faithful witness.

## 2. Jesus is the firstborn from the dead. (5b)

Wait a minute! Jesus is not the first one to be raised from the dead, right? Christ raised a young girl, a young man and Lazarus all from the dead. The firstborn is a description of both pre-eminence and type. There were other resurrections but the resurrection of Christ was different and better. The young girl became an old woman and died. The young man became an old man and died again, as did Lazarus. Christ died and rose again, never to die again. He is the firstborn in the sense that all of his brothers and sisters (us) follow in his steps. We will die and we will rise again to die no more and like Christ, we will have a resurrected and glorified body. This glorious promise anchored by the resurrection of Christ is the source of our future grace and present hope.

## 3. Jesus is the ruler of the kings on earth. (5b)

Over and over Christ told the disciples that he was going to die, but he would rise again. This was not a secret. This claim was so well known and the Pharisees were not only aware of it, but were so unnerved by it, that they requested of Pilate that a guard be posted by the tomb. As much as they had refused to believe everything that Christ had said, their actions reveal that they knew that they were dealing with a man who always did everything that he said he would. To know someone who is always true to his word is such a gift. We get a taste of that, even from his mother, who at the wedding in Cana told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." In other words, you can trust him. That character quality is indeed wonderful. But, when that same person claims to be the light of the world and opens blind eyes; when that same person claims to be the Good Shepherd and he heals diseased bodies; when that same person claims to be the Bread of Life and he feeds 5,000 men with 3 loaves of bread and 2 fish; when that same person claims to be God and walks on water; when that same person claims to be the resurrection and the life and then raises a man from the dead, when that man says, cast your nets on the other side of the boat, it's time to do some fishing; when this man says follow me, it's time to drop everything and run to catch him, and when he says do you believe me – it's time to change your religion. When this man who causes demons to tremble, the devil to run, and angels to worship; who heals paralytics, and opens the ears of the deaf; when this man says, I am going to go to Jerusalem and die and in three days will rise again, Mr. Pharisee, I'm not sure what you were thinking when you requested a couple of soldiers. You could have brought in the entire Roman army to guard that tomb, but if death could not keep him, and the grave could not hold him then no army is going to stop him. Running to Pilate was not a bad idea. They went to the right person; they just had the wrong message. If Christ said he was

going to rise again, then Pilate and Herod every other king should have been warned, you've got less than three days to get off your throne, bend your knee and lay down your crown.

4. **Jesus is the One who loves us.** (5c)

I do not understand why Romeo and Juliet is considered to be such a great love story. Romeo goes to Juliet's tomb where she is in a coma. He doesn't think he can live without her, so he drinks the poison and dies next to her. Then she wakes up and sees that he is dead so she takes his dagger and kills herself. They loved each other, but they are both dead! What good is that? We are loved by one who not only died for us, he rose again for us and will never die again. That means that he not only loved us, he is the one who loves us. "To him who loves us." Jesus loves you right now. Jesus loves you right now as much as he loved you when he died for you. But his death was not only an expression of his love. His death secured our pardon.

5. **Jesus is the One who has freed us from our sins by his blood.** (5c)

Jesus is the One who loves us and demonstrated this by freeing us from our sins by his blood. Sin demands a payment. But the payment that sins demands is one you cannot make. It is beyond you. If it were up to you to pay for your own sins and purchase your own pardon, you would be slave to sin forever. Christ died for you. That means that Christ died for your benefit. Christ died in your place. Christ died as the full and final payment for every single sin of every single person who would ever believe on him for that. When you trust in Christ, you are freed from the penalty of sin. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. You are freed. By his blood means by his wrath-bearing, sin-atoning, justice-satisfying death, he broke the chains of sin and his resurrection proved that. To every one of you who trusts in Christ alone as your Savior, there is no fear in death. There is no guilt in life. You are free from the penalty of sin. As a follower of Christ who is growing in Christ you will experience more and more freedom from the power of sin. And one day, you will be set free from the very presence of sin.

This is why John could pray, bless and promise these believers grace and peace. Grace means to be given what we do not deserve. We have grace from God that saves us, keeps us, sustains us, strengthens us, protects us, encourages us, equips us, blesses us and helps us bless others. Peace from God means that we are peace with him. We are at rest with him. We are accepted by him and at home with him. We are in his family and this family is forever. This glorious God loves us and keeps us forever.

The resurrection of Christ means that he is alive forevermore as he said. This is why there is coming a day when all the enemies of God will wail on account of him. He really is alive and will be reckoned with. For those who trust him, he really is alive and will be with us, loving us – forever. This is our God!