

Revelation 1:17-18

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[0 : 00] God has raised up deliverers for his people.

This morning we met three such deliverers in the book of Judges. Three very different men and yet one experience and reality common to all.

God raised up Othniel. Othniel delivered the people and he died. God raised up Ehud.

He delivered the people and he died. God raised up Shamgar. He delivered the people and he died. The great need of God's people was and is for a deliverer who cannot be defeated by death.

Who cannot be snatched from us by the grave. Othniel and Ehud and Shamgar were all, are all stark reminders of the limitations of mortal men.

[1 : 12] Yes, even mortal men used and chosen by God. And they all point forward to the one who would come. One who could say of himself, as we have read already this evening, I was dead and behold I am alive forever and ever.

Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar all point to Jesus. We closed this morning listening to the words of Jesus found in Revelation chapter 1 that we have just read.

And we also closed recognizing what folly it would be to be pointed to Jesus by these limited deliverers.

As we meet in the book of Judges and yet fail to direct ourselves to the one that they are pointing us to. And aware of that danger, I want this evening to spend a little time looking to the eternal and immortal deliverer, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as he is revealed to us in John's vision, recorded for us in the first chapter of the book of Revelation.

And I'll limit myself to one small part of the vision where we find the words spoken by Jesus. I was dead and behold I am alive forever and ever.

[2 : 43] In these two verses, verses 17 and 18 of the chapter, we're confronted with different truths concerning our risen Redeemer, our living Deliverer.

We're confronted with the reality of the glory of our living Deliverer, the glory of our living Deliverer. We then are given an insight in and an opportunity to see the hand of our living Deliverer, the hand that was placed on a trembling John.

In the very words that are spoken, we're given an insight into the identity of our living Deliverer. Also in the words that he speaks, he points to his mission, the mission, the mission accomplished of our living Deliverer.

And then in the words that close, the words that we read, we are introduced to and presented with the reality of the authority of our living Deliverer.

So with these headings to help us, let's consider for a brief moment these two verses in Revelation chapter 1.

[4 : 06] First of all, then, the glory of our living Deliverer.

John, who was granted this great privilege of witnessing this vision, John, of course, was no stranger to Jesus.

The very one who describes him in such fabulous terms, describing what he saw before him in the chapter that we've read. He was no stranger to Jesus.

He was the beloved disciple. He had walked with Jesus. He had talked with Jesus. He had laughed with Jesus. He had cried with Jesus. They had sat down to eat together.

Friends. And yet, as John is brought in his vision face to face with his risen Savior, we're told that he fell at his feet as though dead.

[5 : 24] The no longer veiled glory and majesty and resplendence of Jesus were too much for John to withstand.

He was cast down and fell prostrate before the one who was before him. And as he falls down before the glory and majesty of his living Deliverer, the one who was both his friend and his sovereign, John follows in the footsteps of other men of God exposed to a similar encounter.

We think of Abraham as his encounter with God is recorded for us in Genesis and chapter 17. First few verses.

And then what do we read? Abraham fell face down.

Or what of Isaiah in his very well-known encounter with God? There in chapter 6 of his book.

[6 : 39] How does he respond as he has this encounter with God? Woe to me, I cry. I am ruined, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.

Why? Why these words? And my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty. Or what of Ezekiel? To name just one more. In the very first chapter of the book of Ezekiel, we read, This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God.

When I saw it, I fell face down, and I heard the voice of one speaking. Abraham, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, John, and many others, gripped and cast down, prostrate by the weight of the glory of the presence of the Lord, the presence of the one who is holy other.

And John, a prisoner on Patmos, as he reminds us, even in this chapter we've read, how John needed to be granted a vision of the glory and majesty of his Savior and Lord.

His captors could, and no doubt did, mock the one that he called Lord. And yet, John would know that if these his enemies, these his captors were to catch, if only a fleeting glimpse of the resplendent glory of his Lord, they too would fall down as dead before him.

[8 : 15] And so in these words that describe how John responds to what he sees, When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

We're given a glimpse of the glory of our living deliverer. But then we are also given a glimpse of his hand, because in what immediately follows there in verse 17 we read, Then he placed his right hand on me and said, Do not be afraid.

The hand of our living deliverer. In the light of what we saw this morning about Ehad, for those who were able to be here this morning, and notice that it is the Lord's right hand that is placed on John.

And what a hand it is. A hand that, as we sing, flung stars into space. A hand that this very chapter describes as holding the seven stars secure in his grip.

It is this same hand that, with a touch that is both strong and tender, is placed on John to bring comfort and reassurance.

[9 : 30] A hand that is accompanied by the fitting words, Do not be afraid. And the right hand of our living deliverer is able to, at one and the same time, hold and protect all his people, the seven stars, the seven churches, representing God's people all over the world, and indeed through time.

His hand holds his people secure. And yet, at the very same time, that hand is able to minister to one of his trembling disciples, as he does here for John.

And that hand still is able to rest on those who fear and fret, on those who are cast down and disheartened, on those who are afraid.

His hand rests upon his own. We could say of John, as his encounter is described for us, that he is awed by the glory of the Lord, but also drawn by the grace of the Lord, as his hand is placed upon him.

And may that be true also of us, awed by his glory, and drawn by his grace. As I try and imagine what is presented for us, and even visualize it, I think we are given permission to do so.

[11 : 02] It is, after all, a very visual account. The intention is that we would, in the measure that we can, visualize this scene that is being painted for us with words. And as I consider the Lord here, before whom John falls down as though dead, and yet the same Lord who places his right hand tenderly upon him.

The picture that comes to my mind, maybe I read too many Narnia books as a child, but the picture that comes to my mind is of Aslan. Aslan in all his strength and majesty, and yet Aslan in all his tenderness and gentleness.

The hand of our living deliverer. But who is the one before whom John falls down as though dead? Who is the one whose hand is placed upon him?

Well, what are we able to discover concerning his identity in the words that he himself speaks? If we just go back a little in the chapter, we notice there in verse 13 that the one John saw and his vision was one like a son of man.

No doubt there is much that could be said of these words. The language echoes the language of the book of Daniel that describes and points forward to the divine Messiah.

[12 : 27] But of course we don't need to spend too much time working out who he is. We know who he is. This is Jesus. And yet in the words of Jesus, clearly identified as the risen Lord, in the words that he speaks in verses 17 and 18, one particular aspect of his identity is highlighted and proclaimed.

And we do want to focus in on this one aspect of his identity, namely his divinity, that he is very God of very God.

Notice the language that he himself uses of himself. There in verse 17, Now this is a language that Jesus uses repeatedly of himself in this very book of Revelation.

If we just notice on one other occasion where this same language is used by the Lord in chapter 22 and in verse 13, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

But as it is used on different occasions within this book by Jesus, it is also crucially language that echoes descriptions of God in the Old Testament.

[13 : 56] If we notice just two of those occasions in the book of Isaiah. First of all, in chapter 44 and in verse 6, this is what the Lord says, Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty, I am the first and I am the last.

Apart from me, there is no God. And then just two or three chapters later in chapter 48 and verse 12, Listen to me, O Jacob, Israel whom I have called.

I am he, I am the first, and I am the last. Our living deliverer is God himself in the person of his Son, the eternal Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us.

The one who knows no beginning, for he is the beginning. But then Jesus also uses other language that casts a light on this aspect of his identity.

In verse 18, Jesus also declares, I am alive forever and ever. I am alive forever and ever. Of whom is this self-same truth expressed in this very book of Revelation in chapter 4.

[15 : 13] And in verse 8, if we pick up the reading in the middle of the verses, the angels praise, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come, whenever his living creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever.

The Lord God Almighty is the one who lives forever and ever. And Jesus, as he speaks of himself, describes himself as the one who is alive forever and ever.

So, we find the use of identical qualities or attributes to describe the Father and the Son. Our living deliverer is God, God the Son.

But in what Jesus says here, we also are given an insight or references made. We are pointed to the mission of our living deliverer.

We might say the mission accomplished of our living deliverer. There is a deep and almost unfathomable mystery in the words of Jesus there in verse 18.

[16 : 24] I am the living one. Well, so far, so good. In the light of what we've already discovered that he says of himself, we can identify this as a reasonable claim.

I am the living one. But then what follows the juxtaposition of this bold claim, I am the living one, but then immediately he goes on to say, I was dead.

I am the living one. I was dead. Of course, he then goes on to say more, and we'll come to that. But just as we think of these words, I am the living one. I was dead.

How can it be? If there is one unchallengeable truth concerning the living one, it is that he is alive. Always. The living one doesn't do dying.

The clue is in the name. I am the living one. And yet, mystery of mysteries, he declares, he declares, I was dead.

[17 : 25] The living one died. And this, of course, speaks of his mission to deliver. It speaks of his mission accomplished.

I was dead. And behold, I am alive forever and ever. Jesus came to die. Jesus came to die. He came to die a sinner's death.

He came to die in the place of rebels and renegades like you and me. He came to take upon himself the punishment due to sin and sinners.

He came to die for us. The living one died. But death could not hold him down. The father raised him from the dead in glorious vindication, declaring to powers visible and invisible that the work of salvation had been wholly and eternally secured.

This deliverer was no limited deliverer. He was not one who would secure a deliverance that would last one generation or maybe two or maybe even three.

[18 : 36] No, the deliverance that he secured was a perfect and eternal and permanent deliverer. Yes, like Othniel, like Ehud, like Shamgar, God's ultimate deliverer died.

But he died not for himself, but for others. And he died not to remain in the grave, but to rise again and live forever and ever.

He is our living deliverer. So let's notice, as we draw things to a close, one final truth concerning our living deliverer in the words that he himself speaks at the close of this verse 18.

The final words, and I hold the keys of death and Hades. These words speak of his authority, the authority of our living deliverer.

The keys symbolize authority. In this case, authority over death itself. Notice that in what Jesus says, and it echoes, of course, the teaching of God's word from beginning to end, we have no pagan dualism.

[19 : 55] With Jesus as the Lord of life, the good God, and the devil as sovereign over death, the bad guy, each sovereign in their own sphere, and struggling to gain ascendance one over the other.

No, we have nothing of this in what Jesus declares of himself. Jesus declares that he is Lord over all. Yes, Lord of life, but also Lord over death.

He has the keys, his keys over death and Hades. It is in his power to send to death and Hades and to rescue from death and Hades.

He has the keys. I hold the keys of death. What would we all be well advised to do in the light of such authority?

Well, really, there is only one reasonable and fitting response in the light of one who holds such authority, and that is to bow down before him.

[21 : 03] Our living deliverer, his glorious countenance, his tender and strong right hand, his divine identity and eternity, his pierced hands that speak of mission accomplished.

And in his hands, he holds the keys of death and Hades. This is the one Othniel and Ehud and Shamgar point us to.

And so I would encourage you and urge you as I hope I do to myself, look to him, trust in him, bow down before him in worship and a service.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. We thank you for the vision that was granted to John and that he was instructed to write down for our benefit that we too might profit from the vision as it is described for us.

And we thank you that we can indeed draw from it much that would instruct us and enable us to have a better understanding of who you are and of who your Son, Jesus, is.

[22 : 25] We pray that we would know something of what it is to bow before his glory, veiled though it still remains in great measure for us. We pray that we would know something of his tender kid in our lives as we do and that we would gratefully acknowledge it.

We thank you that we are able to declare what we read and what we discover that this Jesus, the one who died for us, the one who accomplished this great saving mission for us, is the eternal one, the one who is the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega, the first and the last.

We thank you that he holds the keys of death and Hades and so we need not fear that which our Savior holds in his and under his authority.

Lord, we pray that you would help us to ever look to him, that as in the pages of Scripture we are pointed constantly and repeatedly and tirelessly towards the coming Messiah as our gaze is ever directed to Jesus, that we would be wise in fixing our gaze upon him and coming to know him and to love him and to trust in him ever more.

And all of these things we pray in his name. Amen.