

CHRIST WITH THE KEYS OF DEATH AND HELL

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A SERMON
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BY C. H. SPURGEON
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*“I have the keys of hell and of death.”
Revelation 1:18*

THEN hell and death, terrible powers as they are, are not left to riot without government. Death is a land of darkness, as darkness itself, without any order, yet a sovereign eye surveys it and a Master hand holds its key. Hell also is a horrible region, where powers of evil and of terror hold their high court and dread assembly—but hell trembles at the presence of the Lord and there is a throne higher than the throne of evil.

Let us rejoice that nothing in heaven, or earth, or in places under the earth, is left to itself to engender anarchy. Everywhere, serene above the floods, the Lord sits King forever and ever. No province of the universe is free from the divine rule. Things do not come by chance. Nowhere does chance and chaos reign, nowhere is evil really and permanently enthroned. Rest assured that the Lord has prepared His throne in the heavens and His kingdom rules over all—for if the lowest hell and death own His government, much more all things that are on this lower world.

It is delightful for us to observe, as we read this chapter, that government of hell and of death is vested in the person of the Man, Christ Jesus. He who holds the keys of these dreadful regions is described by John as, “One like unto the Son of man,” and we know that He was our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

John saw a strange and glorious change in Him, but still recognized the old likeness, perhaps impressed by the nail-prints and other marks of manhood which he had seen in Him while yet He was in the days of His flesh. What an honor is thus conferred upon mankind! Unto which of the angels said He at any time, “You shall bear the keys of hell and of death”? Yet these keys are committed to the Son of man and Jesus Christ, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, made in all points like unto His brethren, rules over all.

Yet manhood is not so exalted as of itself, and apart from Godhead, for while the description given of our Lord by John as he saw Him at Patmos, is evidently human, yet is it also convincingly divine. There is a glow of glory about that mysterious manhood, which stood between the golden candlesticks, that comes not of the Virgin Mary, nor of Nazareth, but is a light apart—belonging only to the everlasting God, whose Son the Redeemer is and whose equal He counts it not robbery to be.

Jesus, in essence, is “God over all, blessed for ever.” Let us rejoice, then, in the condescension of God in taking man into such union with Godhead, that now, in the person of Christ, man has dominion over all the works of God's hands.

And He rules not only over all sheep and oxen, and all fowl of the air, and fish of the sea, and whatsoever passes through the paths of the sea, but death and Hades are also committed to the dominion of the glorified man. “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

The metaphor of keys is intended, no doubt, to set forth the double thought of our Lord's possessing both the rightful and the actual dominion over death and hell. The rightful dominion, I say, for often it has been the custom when kings have come to the gates of loyal cities, for the mayor, or high bailiff, or

governor of the city to present the keys in formal state, in recognition that his majesty was the lawful owner and rightful sovereign of the borough.

So Christ has the keys of hell and death—that is to say, He is rightfully the Lord over those dark regions and rules them by indefeasible title of sovereignty. But in commonest life the key is associated with actual possession and power. When the tenant gives up the key to the landlord, then the owner has the house again under his power and in his possession, by that act and deed.

So Christ is not only *de jure* (according to right), but *de facto* (according to fact), Lord over hell and death. He actually rules and manages in all the issues of the grave, and overrules all the councils of hell, restraining the mischievous devices of Satan, or turning them to subserve His own designs of good. Our Lord Jesus Christ still is supreme. His kingdom, willingly or unwillingly, extends over all existences in whatever regions they may be.

It may be well here to remark that the word translated “hell,” though it may be rightfully referred to the region of lost and damned spirits, yet need not be restricted thereto. The word is “Hades,” which signifies the dwelling place of spirits, and so it may include both heaven and hell—no doubt it does include them both in many places, and I think in this.

Our Lord then has the keys of heaven, and hell, and death. Wherever separate spirits are now existing, Christ is King, and over the iron gate through which men pass into the disembodied state, the authority of Christ is paramount. All hail! Thou brightness of the Father’s glory—be Thou evermore adored!

We now come to consider this text in the following lights—first, as we may be enabled and strengthened, we shall consider *the power of the keys*. Secondly, we shall consider *the key of this power*. And thirdly, *the choice reflections locked up in this doctrine of the keys*.

I. What is intended by THE POWER OF THESE KEYS here mentioned?

A key is first of all used *for opening*, and hence our Lord can open the gates of death and hell. It is His to open the gate of the separated spirits, to admit His saints one by one to their eternal felicity. When the time shall come for us to depart out of this world unto the Father, no hand but that of the Well-Beloved shall put that golden key into the lock and open the pearly gate which admits the righteous to the spirit land.

When we have tarried awhile as disembodied spirits in Paradise, it will be Christ’s work to open the gates of the grave wherein our bodies shall have been confined, in order that at the trump of the archangel we may rise to immortality. He is the resurrection and the life—because He lives, we shall live also.

At His bidding every bolt of death’s prison shall be drawn and the huge iron gates of the sepulchre shall be rolled back. Then shall the body sown in weakness be raised in power, sown in dishonor be raised in glory. We need not ask the question, “Can these dry bones live?” when we see in the hands of our omnipotent Savior the golden key.

Death in vain shall have gathered up the carcasses of millions as his treasure, he shall lose all these treasures in a moment, when the Lord shall let go his captives, not for price nor for reward. In the Egypt of the grave no Israelite shall remain a prisoner. There shall not a hoof be left behind—of all that the Father gave to Christ, He will lose nothing—but will surely raise it up at the last day.

Christ has purchased the bodies as well as the souls of His people. He has redeemed them by blood and their mortal frames are the temples of the Holy Ghost. Rest assured He will not lose a part of His purchase. It is not the will of our Father in heaven that the Redeemer should be defrauded of any part of His purchased possession. “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise.”

But a key is also used *to shut* the door, and even so Jesus will both shut in and shut out. His golden key will shut His people in in heaven, as Noah was shut in the ark—

***“Far from a world of grief and sin
With God eternally shut in.”***

There is no fear that glorified saints shall fall from their high estate or that they shall perish after all the salvations which they have experienced. Heaven is the place of eternal safety. There the gates shall be fast shut by which their foes could enter or by which their joys could leave them.

But alas! there is the dark side to this shutting of the gate. It is Christ, who, with His key shall shut the gates of heaven against unbelievers. When once the Master of the house has risen up and has shut the door, it will be useless for mere professors to come with anxious knock and bitter cry, "Lord, Lord, open unto us," for I know that the Son of David, when He shuts, shuts so that no man opens, and He Himself repents not of what He has done.

Once let Him close mercy's gate upon the soul of a man and the iron bar shall never be uplifted. O may none of you know what it is to see Christ shut the door of heaven in your face. It will be terrible when you are expecting to enter into the marriage supper to find yourselves thrust forth into "outer darkness, where shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

Jesus, with His sovereign key, has locked out of heaven all sinners who die impenitent and shut out of heaven all sin. Shut out of heaven all temptation, all trouble, and all pain and death. Shut out of heaven all the temptations of the devil, and not even the howlings of that dog of hell shall be heard across the jasper walls of that New Jerusalem.

A key is used to shut and to open, and so it is used to shut in, in reference to hell and those spirits who are immured there. "Between us and you," said Abraham to Dives, "there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence."

It is Christ's key that has shut in the lost spirits so that they cannot roam by way of respite, nor escape by way of pardon. May you never be so shut in. Christ has the key by which He shuts in Satan. He is to be bound for a thousand years, but Jesus shall hold the chain, for only our Immanuel could bind this old dragon.

When temptation is kept away from a Christian, it is the Savior's restraining power which holds back the arch enemy. And if the enemy comes in like a flood, it is by permission of Jesus that the trial comes. Every roaming of the lion of the pit is permitted by our Master or he could never go forth on his devouring errands.

The key that shall bind the old dragon in those blessed days of the millennial rest is in our Lord's power, and the final triumph, when no sin shall any further be known on earth and evil shall be pent up in the grim caverns of hell, will be achieved by Christ Jesus, the Man, the Mediator, our Lord and God. To open, then, and to shut out, to shut in and to shut out—these are the works of the keys.

By the keys we must further understand here that our Lord *rules*, for the key is the Oriental metaphor for government. He shall have the key of David, "The government shall be upon his shoulder." We understand by Christ's having the keys of hell that He rules over all that are in hell. Hence *He rules over the damned spirits*.

They would not in this life have this Man to rule over them, but in the life to come they must submit whether they will or not. In that seething caldron every wave of fire is guided by the will of the Man, Christ, and the mark of His sovereignty is on every iron chain. This the ungodly will be compelled to feel with terror, for although the ferocity of their natures will remain, yet the boastfulness of their pride shall be taken from them.

Though they would still revolt, they shall find themselves hopelessly fettered and powerless to accomplish their designs. Though they would fain continue stouthearted as Pharaoh and cry, "Who is the LORD, that we should obey his voice?" they shall find their loins loosed like Belshazzar's on that dreadful night when his city was destroyed.

They shall wring their hands in anguish and bite their tongues in despair. One of the great terrors of the lost in hell will be this—that He who came to save was rejected by them and now only reveals Himself to them as mighty to destroy. He who held out the silver sceptre when they would not touch it, shall forever break them with a rod of iron for their willful impenitence.

You despisers, behold and wonder! If you will not honor the Lord willingly, you shall submit by force of arms. What must be the consternation of those who were loudest against Christ on earth, the men who denied His deity, the infidels who vented curses upon His blessed name—your Voltaires and Tom Paines, who were never satisfied except when they uttered bitter words against the Man of Nazareth?

What will be their amazement! What confusion to the wretch who said he would crush the wretch, to find himself crushed by Him whom he despised! What consternation and confusion shall overwhelm that man who said he lived in the twilight of Christianity, to find himself where the blaze of Christ's glory shall forever be as a furnace to his guilty soul!

O that none of us may know what it is to be ruled in justice by Christ, because we would not be ruled by mercy. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." But beware, you who forget Him, lest He tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver.

As in hell Christ has power over all the damned spirits, so our text implies that He has power over all *the devils*. It was willfulness, doubtless, that made Satan revolt against God. Peradventure, Milton's poetic surmise is not far from the truth and Satan did think it, "better to rule in hell than serve in heaven."

But fool that he was, he has to serve in hell with a service ten thousand times more irksome than that which would have been his lot in heaven. There, first-born Son of the Morning, brightest of the angels of God, how happy might have been his perpetual service of the Most High. But now blighted by the scathing thunderbolts of JEHOVAH, he crawls forth from his den degraded, going like the serpent on his belly, with dust to be his meat, debased beneath the very beasts of the field, and cursed above all cattle, going forth for meanest ends, seeking to tempt others that they may come into the same loathsome condition with himself.

Yet, mark how even in those temptations of his, Satan is ruled by Christ! He permits the foul fiend to tempt, but there is always a, "Hitherto shalt thou go, and no further," just as Satan was permitted to try Job up to a certain point, but beyond that point he must not heap up the patriarch's agony. Thus in all cases Christ rules Satan by restraining him.

Yea, and even in that which he is permitted to do, God strengthens His servants so that Satan gets no honor in the contest, but retires continually more and more disgraced by being defeated by the poor sons of Adam. Cunning spirit as he is, he is worsted in the conflict with poor creatures who dwell in flesh. Ay, and better still, out of all the temptations of Satan, God's people are made to derive profit and strength.

In our exercises and conflicts, we are taught our weakness and led to fly to Christ for strength. And so, as Samson's slain lion yielded him honey, out of the eater comes forth meat, and out of the strong comes forth sweetness. An abject slave of Christ are you, O Satan, a very scullion in the kitchen of providence.

When you think most to effect your own purposes and to overthrow the Kingdom of Christ on earth, even then what are you but a mere hack, accomplishing still the purposes of your Master, whom in vain you do blaspheme! Lo, at Christ's girdle are the keys of hell. Let the whole legion of accursed spirits tremble.

Brethren, I have said that the word "Hades" here may include both hell and heaven, or the whole state of separated spirits. Hence we are bound to remark that our Savior rules over all *the glorified spirits in heaven*, and all the angels that are their associates and ministering spirits. Is not this a delightful reflection, that the Redeemer is the King of angels, for in times of danger He can send an angel to strengthen us, or if needs be, twenty legions of angels would soon find their way to stand side by side with the weak but faithful warrior of the cross.

O believer, you can never be cast where divine succors cannot reach you. Angels see their way by night, and journey over mount and sea with unwearied flight, unimpeded by wind or tempest. They can

meet your enemy, the prince of the power of the air, and overcome him for you, as doubtless oftentimes they do unknown to us, in mysterious battles of the spirits.

You shall never be left to perish, while the chariots of God which are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels, are all at the beck and command of Him who has redeemed you with His precious blood.

Joyous is the thought that Jesus rules over all redeemed spirits in heaven, for we hope to be there soon, and this shall be among our dearest joys, that without temptation, without infirmity, without weariness, we shall serve our Lord day and night in His temple.

My brethren, of all the joys of heaven, next to that of being with Christ, one delights to think of serving Christ. Ah! how rapturous will be our song! How zealously we will praise Him! How earnest shall be our service! If He should give us commissions to distant worlds, as perhaps He will, if He shall prepare us to become preachers of His truth to creatures in unknown orbs, if He shall call us through revolving ages to publish to new created myriads the wondrous grace of God in Christ, with what ardent pleasure will we accept the service!

How constantly, how heartily will we tell out the story of our salvation by the precious blood of Jesus! O that we could serve Him here as we wish, but we shall serve Him there without fault or flaw. Oh, happy heaven, because Jesus has the key of it and reigns supreme, when we shall stand upon His sea of glass before His throne.

One more remark is wanted to complete the explanation of the power of the keys. Our Lord is said to have the keys of death, from which we gather that *all the issues of death* are at His alone disposal. No man can die unless as Jesus opens the mystic door of death. Even the ungodly man owes his spared life to Christ.

It is the intercession and the interposition of Jesus that keeps breath even in the swearer's nostrils. Long since had you been consumed in the fire of God's wrath, O sinner, had not Jesus used His authority to keep you out of the jaws of death. As for His saints, it is their consolation that their death is entirely in His hands.

In the midst of fever and pestilence, we shall never die until He wills it. In the times of the greatest health, when all the air is balm, we shall not live a second longer than Jesus has purposed. The place, the circumstance, the exact second of our departure have all been appointed by Him, and settled long ago in love and wisdom.

A thousand angels would not hurl us to the grave, nor could a host of cherubim confine us there one moment after Jesus said, "Arise." This is our comfort. We are "immortal till our work is done"—mortal still, but immortal also. Let us never fear death, then, but rather rejoice at the approach of it, since it comes at our dear Bridegroom's bidding.

There be some who count it a most notable expectation, that perhaps they may be among the number of those who shall not sleep, but be alive and remain at the Lord's coming. I am sure I would not disturb any joy which they can derive from such a contemplation. For my own part, if I had the choice, I would prefer to die, for it seems to me that such as do not die, while they cannot have any preference over them that fall asleep, (for we are told they shall not prevent them that are asleep), will lose much of desirable experience.

They will never be able to say in heaven, "I was made like unto my dying Savior." They can never say that they have slept in the grave as He did. They can never say, "My body came forth in the resurrection as His did." I would gladly be in all points made like unto my Lord—to have fellowship with Him in all respects.

"To die," says the apostle, "is gain." I will add, a gain I would not lose, and "Death is yours," says the apostle, nor would we have it rent away from us. Though the prospect of our Lord's coming is sweet, immeasurably sweet, yet the prospect of going to Him meanwhile if so He wills it, is not without its sweetness too. Christ has the key of death and therefore death to us is no longer a gate of terror.

Thus have I, as best I could, while suffering much bodily pain, labored to open up to you what is the power of the keys in the Redeemer's hands.

II. What is THE KEY OF THIS POWER?

Whence did Christ obtain this right to have the keys of hell and death? Does He not derive it, first of all from *His Godhead*?

In the eighteenth verse, He says, "I am he that liveth"—language which only God can use, for while we live, yet it is only with a borrowed life, like the moon that shines with a borrowed light, and as the moon cannot say, "I am the orb that shines," neither can man say, "I am he that liveth." God says, "I am and there is none beside me," and Jesus being God, claims the same self-existence. "I am he that liveth."

Now, since Christ is God, He certainly has power over heaven, and earth, and hell. There can be no dispute concerning the divine prerogative. He is the Creator of all things. He is the preserver of all things. All power belongs unto Him. As for all things that are apart from Him, they would vanish as a puff of air is gone, if so He willed it. He alone exists. He alone is. Therefore let Him wear the crown, let Him have undivided rule.

That doctrine of the deity of Christ, how I tremble for those who will not receive it! Brethren, if there be anything in the Word of God that is clear and plain, it is surely this. If there be any doctrine that is necessary for our salvation, it is this. How could we trust to a mere man? If there be anything that can give us comfort when we come to rest upon Christ, it is just this, that we are not looking to an angel nor depending upon a creature, but are resting upon Him who is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the Almighty God.

O you who dare trust in a man, I pity you for your credulity. But you who cannot trust in Jesus, the living God, I may well blame you for your unbelief. Having such a rock of our salvation as the ever-living and ever-blessed God, let the thought kindle in our souls purest joy.

But the key to this power lies also in our Savior's *conquests*. He has the keys of death and hell because He has actually conquered both of these powers. You know how He met hell in the dreadful onset in the garden—how all the powers of darkness there combined against Him. Such was the agony of that struggle that He sweat great drops of blood falling to the ground. Yet He sustained the brunt of that onset without wavering, and kept the field unbeaten.

He continued still to wrestle with those evil powers upon the cross, and in that thick midday midnight into which no curious eyes could pry—in the midst of that darkness He continued still to fight. His heel was bruised, but breaking meanwhile the dragon's head. Grim was the contest, but glorious was the victory, worthy to be sung by angels in eternal chorus.

Take down your sweetest harps, you seraphs, lift up your loudest notes, you cherubim, unto Him who fought the dragon and overcame him, to Michael the great archangel of the covenant, unto Him be glory forever and ever. Well does Jesus deserve to rule the provinces which He has subdued in fight. He has conquered the king of hell, and destroyed the works of the devil, and good right has he to be King over the domain of the vanquished.

As to death, you know how our Lord vanquished him! By death he conquered death. When the hands were nailed, they became potent to fight with the grave. When the feet were fastened to the wood, then began they to trample on the sepulchre. When the death pangs began to thrill through every nerve of the Redeemer's body, then His arrows shot through the loins of death, and when His anguished soul was ready to take its speedy flight, and leave His blessed corpse, then did the tyrant sustain a mortal wound.

Our Lord's entrance into the tomb was the taking possession of His enemies' stronghold. His sleep within the sepulchre's stony walls was the transformation of the prison into a couch of rest. But especially in the resurrection. When, because He could not be held by the bonds of death, neither could His soul be kept in Hades, He rose again in glory, then did He become the "death of death and hell's destruction," and rightfully was He acknowledged the plague of death and the destruction of the grave.

As if to prove that He had the keys of the grave, Jesus passed in and passed out again, and He has made free passage now for His people—free entrance and free exit. Whether, when our Lord died, His soul actually descended into hell itself we will not assert or deny—the elder theologians all assert that He did, and hence they inserted in the Creed, the sentence, “He descended into hell,” meaning, many of them, at any rate, hell itself.

It was not till Puritanic times that that doctrine began to be generally questioned, when it was, as I think rightly asserted, that Jesus Christ went into the world of separated spirits, but not into the region of the damned. Well, it is not for us to speak where Scripture is silent, but why may it not be true that the Great Conqueror cast the shadow of His presence over the dens of His enemies as He passed in triumph by the gates of hell?

May not the keepers of that infernal gate have seen His star and trembled as they also beheld their Master like lightning fall from heaven? Would it not add to His glory if those who were His implacable foes were made to know of His complete triumph? At any rate, it was but a passing presence, for we know that swiftly He sped to the gates of heaven, taking with Him the repentant thief to be with Him that day in Paradise.

Jesus had opened thus the grave by going into it, hell by passing by it, heaven by passing into it, heaven again by passing out of it, death again by rising from it into this world, and heaven by His ascension. Thus passing and repassing, He has proved that the keys are at His girdle. At any rate, by His achievements, by His doings, He has won for Himself the power of the keys.

We have one more truth to remember—that Jesus Christ is installed in this high place of power and dignity by the Father Himself, as a *reward for what He has done*. He was Himself to “divide the spoil with the strong,” but the Father had promised to give Him a “portion with the great.” See the reward for the shame which He endured among the sons of men!

He stooped lower than the lowest—He has risen higher than the highest. He wore the crown of thorns, but now He wears the triple crown of heaven, and earth, and hell. He was the servant of servants, but now He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Earth would not find Him shelter—a stable must be the place of His birth, and a borrowed tomb the sepulchre of His dead body—but now all space is His.

Time and eternity tremble at His bidding, and there is no creature, however minute or vast, that is not subject to Him. How greatly has the Father glorified Him whom men rejected and despised! Let us adore Him. Let our hearts, while we think over these plain but precious truths, come and spread their riches at His feet, and crown Him Lord of all.

III. THE PRACTICAL BEARING of the whole subject appears to be this—according to the seventeenth verse—“*Fear not.*”

This manifestation of Christ, as having the keys of death and hell, was given to the trembling John, who had fallen down with astonishment and dread as one dead, to comfort him, and as if to make this clear, the words were spoken, “Fear not.”

Beloved, those words I would address to you this morning, “Fear not.” Why need you fear? There is no possible cause for fear for believers, since Jesus lives. “But I may be very poor,” says one.

*“Since Christ is rich, can you be poor?
What can you want beside?”*

“But I may be very sick,” says another. “I will make all their bed in their sickness,” says the Lord. And since Christ is with you, sickness shall work your soul’s health. “Ah,” says another, “I may be grievously tempted.” But while He lives, He will pray for you that your faith fail not, though Satan has desired to have you.

Yes, but you yourselves are very frail, you say, and you fear that in some dark hour that frailty may overcome your faith. Yes, but He ever lives, and you are one with Him, and who shall destroy you while

the vital energy pours from your covenant Head into you as a member of His body? I say again, there is no possible cause for fear to any soul that believes in Christ.

You shall ransack the corruptions of your heart within, you can count your trials without, you can imagine all the tribulations that shall come tomorrow, and reflect on all the sins that were with you yesterday and in the past, you can peer into the shades of death and horrors of hell, but I declare solemnly to you that there is nothing in any of these which you, believing in Christ, have any cause to fear.

Nay, if they should all unite, if the whole together, the world, the flesh, the devil, in trinity of malice should all come against you, while you have a living faith in a living Savior, “Fear not,” is but the logical inference from that precious fact. Carry this fearlessness in your life and be happy as a king. Oh, with nothing else but a living Savior, how rich ought a saint to be! and with everything else, but missing that living Savior, how miserable the richest and the greatest of men always would be if they did but know their true state as before the Lord!

Now observe that this “Fear not” may be specially applied to the matter of the grave. We need not fear to die, because Jesus has the key of the grave—we shall never pass through that iron gate with an angel to be our conductor, or some grim executioner to lead us, as it were, through the Traitor’s Gate, or into a dreary place of hideous imprisonment.

No, Jesus shall come to our dying bed, in all the glory of His supernal splendor and shall say, “Come with Me, from Lebanon, My spouse, with Me from Lebanon. Look from the top of Amana, for the day breaks and the shadows flee away.”

The sight of Jesus, as He thrusts in the key and opens that gate of death, shall make you forget the supposed terrors of the grave, for they are but suppositions, and you shall find it sweet to die. Since Jesus has the sepulchre’s key, never fear it again. never fear it again. Depend upon it, your dying hour will be the best hour you have ever known.

Your last will be your richest moment—better than the day of your birth will be the day of your death. It shall be the beginning of heaven, the rising of a sun that shall go down no more forever. Let the fear of death be banished from you by faith in a living Savior.

Some saints have a fear of the world of spirits. “Oh,” say they, “it must be a dreadful thing to enter that unknown land. We have stood and peered as best we could through the mist that gathers over the black river, and have wondered what it must be like to have left the body, and to be flitting, a naked soul, through that land from which no traveler has e’er returned.”

Ah! but perhaps, you imagined that you were sailing into an enemy’s country, but Jesus is King in Hades, as well as Lord of earth. It is not as though you crossed the channel from England into France, and were among a people speaking another language, and owning another sovereignty. It is but as passing the Tweed from England to Scotland—you do but pass from one province of your Lord’s empire into another, and indeed from a darker into a brighter territory of the same one sovereign.

In that spirit-land they speak the same tongue, the tongue of the New Jerusalem, which you have already begun to lisp. They own the King whom you here obey. And when you shall enter into the assemblies of those disembodied spirits you shall find them all singing to the praise of the same glorious One whom you have adored today, rejoicing in the light which was your light on earth, and triumphing in His love which was your Savior here below. Be of good courage, Jesus is King of Hades. Fear not.

Neither, brethren, ought we to fear the devil. We ought to be watchful against him, but we must not fear him so that he may get an advantage from our fear. “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” Stand trembling and he will attack you worse than ever. The boldness of courageous faith is that which makes the devil tremble.

Well may you be brave, for when he comes howling at you like a lion, you may taunt him thus and say, “Ah, show your teeth, and howl, and yell, but you are chained. You can do no more than threaten me. You think to worry me, but you cannot devour me, and therefore I defy you. Avaunt, in the name of Jesus Christ who bruised you, dragon of hell, avaunt!”

The courage that shall enable you thus to deal with the enemy, while it gives glory to your Lord and Master, shall give rapid victory unto you. He is a chained enemy. This leviathan has a bit between his jaws and a hook in his nose. He may vex you for a while, but you shall be “more than conqueror through him that loved thee”—therefore fear not. That is the lesson from the text to the child of God.

One other word to the believer of God. Should not this contemplation make us say, “Let us worship Him who has the keys of hell and death? Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving and show ourselves glad in Him with songs?”

Preaching is not the great end of the Sabbath-day—listening to sermons is not the great aim of Sundays. It is a means. What is the end? Why, the end, as far as we can attain it on earth, is for us to glorify God in service and especially in the singing of His praises. Worship rendered to God in prayer and praise is the true fruit of the Sabbath, and I am afraid we are behind in this.

I wish that when believers come together, they would render unto Christ the coronals of their hymns, to crown him Lord of all. His enemies miss no opportunity to spite Him. Those that hate His Gospel are zealous to bring shame upon it. Oh, miss no opportunities to extol Him with your praises, and to honor Him with the holiness of your lives, and the zeal of your service.

Is He King over heaven, and death, and hell? Then shall He be King over the triple territory of my spirit, soul, and body. And I will make all my powers and passions yield Him praise.

To conclude. If to the righteous the lesson from all this is, “Fear not,” methinks the lesson to the ungodly is, “Fear and tremble.” Christ has the key of death. Then you may die this moment—you may die before you reach your homes. You have not the key of death—you cannot, therefore, prolong your life.

But Christ has it and He can end the times of His long-suffering with you just when He so wills it. And what would it be to some of you if the gate of death were opened for you and you were driven through it like dumb driven cattle this very day? O man, what would become of you? O woman, what would become of you, if now those eyes should glaze and that pulse should stop?

I beseech you, consider your ways, and turn unto God, lest you die and perish on a sudden. Remember, soul, that even if you would fight it out with Christ and be His enemy, yet you cannot, for He is Lord and will be Lord. Even should you fly to hell to escape Him, He rules there. “If I make my bed in hell thou art there.”

“Oh,” said one who had gone into the backwoods of America far away and there met a preacher, “I thought I had escaped these Methodists and here comes a parson worrying me even here.” “Yes,” said the other, “if you went to heaven you would find religion there, and if you go to hell you will, I am afraid, find preachers even there.”

If religion thus follows a man, how much more does the power of God surround him! You cannot escape from the Lord of all true preachers, if you can escape from them. Wherever you may go, there shall the remembrances of His rejected love pierce you like barbed arrows.

Even in hell shall the glory of His power, which you could not thrust down though you tried to do it, strike you with a deeper despair. I implore you to listen to His Gospel. He that believeth and is baptised, shall be saved. This is the message He gave us when He was taken up—almost the last word He spake ere He rose into His glory. “Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

O then, yield to His Gospel. Believe, that is, trust implicitly in Him who died on the cross of Calvary to make atonement and now lives to make intercession. Trust in Him, and then come forth and confess your trust. Be baptized in His name, confessing your sins, and acknowledging yourself to be His disciple.

This is the Gospel—reject it at your peril. Submit to it, I beseech you, for Christ’s sake.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—REVELATION 1

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.