

HWMR: EXPERIENCING, ENJOYING, AND EXPRESSING CHRIST (4) (Week 2)

Christ Having the Keys of Death and Hades

Scripture Reading: Rev. 1:17-18; 10:7; 12:11; 15:1, 8; Acts 2:24; Phil. 3:10-11

- Rev. 1:17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead; and He placed His right hand on me, saying, Do not fear; I am the First and the Last
- Rev. 1:18 And the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever; and I have the keys of death and of Hades.
- Rev. 10:7 But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel when he is about to trumpet, then the mystery of God is finished, as He has announced the good news to His own slaves the prophets.
- Rev. 12:11 And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they loved not their soul-life even unto death.
- Rev. 15:1 And I saw another sign in heaven, great and wonderful, seven angels having seven plagues, the last plagues; for in them the fury of God was finished.
- Rev. 15:8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one could enter into the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.
- Acts 2:24 Whom God has raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, since it was not possible for Him to be held by it.
- Phil. 3:10 To know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,
- Phil. 3:11 If perhaps I may attain to the out-resurrection from the dead.

Day 1

- Rev. 2:8 - And to the messenger of the church in Smyrna write: These things says the First and the Last, who became dead and lived again.*
- Rev. 22:13 - I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End*

I. “I am the First and the Last and the living One”—Rev. 1:17b-18a:

- A. Christ’s being the First and the Last implies that **He will accomplish what He has begun**.
- B. The Lord Jesus is not only the First but also the **Beginning**, and not only the Last but also the **End**—21:6; 22:13:
1. *The First* indicates that **none is before Him**, and *the Last* that **none is after Him**.
 2. *The Beginning* indicates that He is the **origination** of all things, and *the End* that He is the **consummation** of all things.
 3. The indication here is not only that there is nothing before or after the Lord Jesus but also that there is no origination or consummation without Him.
- C. Christ is not only the First and the Last but also the Beginning and the End; this assures us that having started the church life, **He will surely accomplish it**—cf. 2 Tim. 4:5:

1. The Lord Jesus will **never leave** His work **unfinished**—Rev. 10:7; 15:1, 8.
2. All the local churches must believe that the Lord Jesus is the Beginning and the End.
3. He will accomplish what He has begun in His recovery.

Day 2

Rev. 1:17-18 - ...I am the First and the Last and the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever; and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

Acts 2:24 - Whom God has raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, since it was not possible for Him to be held by it.

- D. The Christ who walks in the midst of the churches, who is the Head of the churches and to whom the churches belong, is the **living One**; hence, the churches also, as the expression of the Body, should be **living, fresh, and strong**—2:1.

"I am the First and the Last and the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever; and I have the keys of death and of Hades." Here we see that the Lord used two ways to reveal Himself. First, He revealed Himself **through His glory**. John recognized this immediately. Second, He revealed Himself **through His word**. This was something inward which John could not see with his eyes. The Lord had to use words to reveal Himself. From this passage we can see that the Lord revealed Himself in three aspects:

- (1) In His position: "I am the First and the Last." This is the Old Testament way of addressing Jehovah (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12), indicating that **He is the eternally unchanging God**.
- (2) In His life: "And the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever." This indicates that **He has eternal life**. Although He died for man's sins, He is now resurrected. Moreover, He will never die again since **He is living forever and ever**.
- (3) In His authority: "And I have the keys of death and of Hades." We have to look at this point in detail. "Death" concerns the body. "Hades" concerns the soul. Once a man dies, his soul enters Hades, which means the world below, that is, the center of the globe. Hades is divided into two sections. One is the place of suffering, where the unbelievers go; the other is the place of rest, where the saved ones go. However, this is only temporary; the eternal separation is between the new heaven and the new earth on one side and the lake of fire on the other. "Keys" are for opening doors. This shows that both death and Hades have doors which may be locked. Whoever holds these keys in his hand has the authority. This authority over death and Hades was originally in the hand of Satan, **but ever since the Lord was resurrected from the dead, death and Hades have lost their power**. Moreover, the keys of death and of Hades have been put into the Lord's hand. Oh, what a victory this is! Because of this, at the coming of the millennial kingdom, the Lord will be able to release those who belong to Him.

(Collected Works of Watchman Nee, The (Set 1) Vol. 16: Study on Revelation, Chapter 2)

II. “I became **dead**, and behold, I am **living forever and ever**”— 1:18a:

- A. The Lord **suffered death** and **lived again**—2:8.
- B. Christ entered into death, but **death could not hold Him** (Acts 2:24), because **He is the resurrection** (John 11:25).
- C. Resurrection is the **lengthening of the Lord’s days**; He will exist forever and ever in His resurrection:
 - 1. Jesus Christ today is the living One, the One who is in resurrection.
 - 2. For Christ to dispense life, He must be the living One.
- D. The importance of Christ’s being the living One is that **He is living forever and is living in us**:
 - 1. He wants us to **leave every kind of death** and **rise up to be the living church**.
 - 2. The more living we are, the more we are the testimony of the living Jesus—Rev. 12:11.

Day 3

1 Pet. 3:18-20 - For Christ also has suffered once for sins, the Righteous on behalf of the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God, on the one hand being put to death in the flesh, but on the other, made alive in the Spirit; In which also He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, Who had formerly disobeyed when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared; entering into which, a few, that is, eight souls, were brought safely through by water.

III. “In which also He [Christ] **went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison**”—1 Pet. 3:19:

- A. *The spirits* here refers not to the disembodied spirits of dead human beings held in Hades but to the **angels** (angels are spirits—Heb. 1:14) **who fell through disobedience** at Noah’s time and are imprisoned in pits of gloom, awaiting the judgment of the great day—2 Pet. 2:4-5; Jude 6.
- B. After His death in the flesh, **Christ in His living Spirit** as His divinity went to the abyss to these rebellious angels to **proclaim God’s victory**, accomplished through His incarnation in Christ and Christ’s death in the flesh, over Satan’s scheme to derange the divine plan.
- C. *Prison* (1 Pet. 3:19) refers to Tartarus, the **deep and gloomy pits**, where the fallen angels are kept.

Day 4

Rev. 9:1-2 - And the fifth angel trumpeted, and I saw a star out of heaven fallen to the earth, and to him was given the key of the pit of the abyss. And he opened the pit of the abyss, and smoke went up out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit.

IV. “I saw a **star** out of heaven fallen to the earth, and to him was given the key of the pit of the abyss”—Rev. 9:1-2; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3:

- A. The star in Revelation 9:1 refers to **Satan**, who will be **cast down** from heaven to earth:
 - 1. The **angels** are likened to **stars**—Job 38:7; Rev. 12:4.
 - 2. **Satan**, as the archangel, was the **Daystar**—Isa. 14:12.
- B. “Who will descend into the abyss?” that is, to bring Christ up from the dead”—Rom. 10:7:
 - 1. In Greek the word rendered as “abyss” is *abyssos*.
 - 2. This word is used in Luke 8:31 in reference to the **dwelling place of the demons**—vv. 27, 33, 35, 38.
 - 3. It also occurs in Revelation 9:1-2 and 11 to denote the place out of which the “locusts,” whose king is Apollyon, will come.
 - 4. In Revelation 11:7 and 17:8 it signifies the place out of which the beast, which is the Antichrist, will ascend.
 - 5. In Revelation 20:1 and 3 it specifies the **place into which Satan will be cast and imprisoned** during the millennium.
 - 6. In Romans 10:7 *abyss* points to the place Christ visited after His death and before His resurrection, which place, according to Acts 2:24 and 27, is Hades, for Acts 2:24 and 27 reveal that Christ went into Hades after He died and **rose from that place in His resurrection**.
 - 7. According to biblical usage, the word **abyss always refers to the region of death** and of Satan’s power of darkness into which Christ after His death descended as into the lower parts of the earth (Eph. 4:9), which He conquered, and from which He ascended in His resurrection.

According to biblical usage, the word *abyss* always refers to the **region of death and of Satan’s power of darkness** into which Christ after His death descended as into the lower parts of the earth, which He conquered, and from which He ascended in His resurrection.

Before proceeding to the following points of the outline, we will focus on something personal to each one of us, that is, on something that must take place with every one of us. It is necessary to present the objective facts of the abyss and to understand them. However, those facts are all outward. **Inwardly, something is also going to take place in the depths of each of our beings.** We need to know that such depths exist within each one of us. Furthermore, we need to know what must take place with regard to those depths. We therefore turn to consider **our abyss**.

One day when I was living and serving in Texas, I was driving home for lunch. For some reason, as I was driving, I was talking to the Lord about the abyss. I was asking Him what it was, and how He dealt with it. In response, He inwardly said something like this to me: “I’m going to deal with your abyss, with your being.” As I have already mentioned above, the word **abyss refers to the deepest part, a part so deep that, even though we know it is there, we cannot reach it.** As we have seen on the objective side, it is there where the enemy is, where the demons are, and from whence the Antichrist will come. My conversation with the Lord while driving, however, brought me to the subjective aspect and to a tender point.

The point is this: **in order for Christ to make His home in our heart, He needs to have access to go down to the depths of our being.** As we have seen, we have the spirit on one side, the body of sin on the other, and the soul between them. In His shepherding of us and in His dispensing of Himself into us, Christ wants to reach the depths of our soul beyond anything we know. (*The Ministry of the Word*, vol. 30, No. 2, chapter 38)

Day 5

Rev. 1:17:18 - ...I am the First and the Last and the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever; and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

Phil. 3:10-11 - To know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if perhaps I may attain to the out-resurrection from the dead.

Day 6

Matt. 16:18 - ...Upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Rev. 20:14 - And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

V. In Revelation 1:18b the Lord Jesus says, “I have the **keys of death and of Hades**”:

- A. Due to the **fall** and the **sin of man**, **death has come in** and is now operating on earth to collect all sinful people and to bring them to Hades, the place where the dead are kept.
- B. In the **church life**, however, we are **no longer subject to death and Hades**—Phil. 3:10-11.
- C. Christ **abolished** death on the cross, and He **overcame** Hades in His resurrection:
 - 1. Although death tried its best to hold Christ, it was powerless to do so—Acts 2:24.
 - 2. Christ is both God and resurrection (John 1:1; 11:25), possessing the **indestructible life** (Heb. 7:16).
 - 3. Because He is such an **everliving One**, death is not able to hold Him.
 - 4. Christ delivered Himself to death, but death had **no way to detain Him**; instead, death was defeated by Him, and He rose up from it.
 - 5. With Christ, therefore, **death has no sting**, and **Hades has no power**.
- D. Because Christ is **the One in the church** who is the Holder of the keys of death and Hades, death and Hades should not have any power over us.
- E. In the church life the keys of death and Hades are in the Lord’s hand.
- F. It is **impossible for us to deal with death**:
 - 1. We simply **do not have the ability** to handle it.
 - 2. Whenever death enters, many will be overcome by it.
- G. If we give the Lord Jesus the **ground**, the **opportunity**, and the **free way** to move and act among us, both death and Hades will be under His control—Matt. 16:18; Rev. 20:14:
 - 1. When the Lord Jesus does not have the ground in the church, death immediately becomes prevailing, and Hades becomes powerful to hold the dead ones.
 - 2. It is crucial for us to see that **Christ has the keys, the authority**, of death and Hades—John 5:27; 17:2; Rev. 12:10.
 - 3. Death is **subject to Him**, and Hades is **under His control**.
- H. We should **praise the Lord** that Christ has the keys of death and of Hades—1:18; Heb. 13:15; 1 Pet. 1:7; Rev. 19:5-6.

Philippians 3:10 says, “*To know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.*” When Paul wrote the Epistle to the Philippians, he had the experiential knowledge of Christ and was **experiencing the power of His resurrection**. While in the Roman prison, he may have been bound in stocks under the threat of execution by being beheaded or thrown to wild beasts in the amphitheater. In that situation he needed to know the power of the resurrection of Christ. The power of Christ’s resurrection is His resurrection life which raised Him from among the dead. It is the resurrected and resurrecting Christ. This power was in Paul as the **bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ**. The reality of the power of Christ’s resurrection is the Spirit, and the bountiful supply of the Spirit is the power of resurrection. The nature of Christ’s resurrection is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Without the Spirit of Jesus Christ, there is no resurrection.

Today the Spirit is in our human spirit. The way to experientially know the power of resurrection is to **turn to our spirit and remain in our spirit**. It may not be necessary to pray to remain in our spirit. We may simply **praise, sing hallelujahs, and shout triumphantly**. This is the way to experience the power of Christ’s resurrection.

In order to experience the power of resurrection, **we are brought into suffering**. Paul experienced the power of resurrection in a Roman prison. If we do not experience suffering, we cannot know this power. In this sense, the power of resurrection needs a “prison.” Marriage life is an example of this kind of imprisonment. In a good sense, our marriage does not usher us into a banquet but into a “prison.”

To experientially know the power of Christ’s resurrection needs us to be put into the mold of suffering. In Philippians 3:10 Paul speaks of the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings. The Lord Jesus calls us to follow Him in His sufferings, bearing the cross. **To bear the cross is to enjoy the fellowship of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus.** (*The Experience and Growth in Life*, Chapter 12)