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Revelation 1:17-18
"Jesus 101"

I. HIS UNIQUE IDENTITY

- A. It is a shared identity
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II. HIS UNIQUE VITALITY

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III. HIS UNIQUE AUTHORITY

- A. His possession of these keys
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1. Throughout the summer my dad has been sending me photos of the different places through which he and my mom have travelled.
2. The other day, he sent me a picture from Arizona. It certainly looked liked Arizona to me. There was the rust red desert, strange shaped mountains, and a clear, blue sky.
3. The truth is, however, not all of Arizona was in that picture. All that was in that picture *was* Arizona, but not all of Arizona was in that picture.
4. In much the same way, no single verse or passage in the Bible can really the capture the fullness of who Jesus is.
5. At the close of the fourth gospel written about the life of Jesus, John 21:25 says, *"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written..."*
6. It takes the whole Bible to get a full view of Jesus, and even then there are things about Him we will not know until we see Him face to face.
7. With that being said, as we come to consider Him who is the Head of the Church, and the Author and Finisher of our Faith, I think we would do well to choose a text in which the Lord Jesus speaks for Himself.
8. Toward the close of Revelation chapter one, we find what you might call an autobiographical statement from the lips of Jesus to His disciple John.
9. John *first* heard His voice, and then turned to see Jesus in a way and a form like He had never seen him before. John said, *"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead."*

10. Jesus laid His hand upon John, and said, "*Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.*"

11. This wonderful statement, taken from opening chapter of the closing book of the Bible, teaches us and reminds us of just who Jesus is.

12. There is a message I heard several years ago from Pastor Larry Brown entitled, "There Ain't Nobody Like Him". That may be poor grammar, but it is good preaching.

13. As we consider what our Lord and Savior says about Himself in this text, we are reminded that there is no one like Jesus! Notice what He says here. First of all, He speaks of:

I. HIS UNIQUE IDENTITY

1. One of the more modern crimes is that of identity theft. People steal the personal information of someone else, and use it to get credit and make purchases.

2. I heard someone once say, "No one will steal my identity, because nobody wants to be me."

3. When it comes to the Lord Jesus, no one *can* steal His identity. No person can ever be all that He is. His is a unique identity.

4. He identified Himself to John in verse 17 by saying, "*...I am the first and the last...*" That phrase is interesting, and it points us to who Jesus really is.

5. Consider His unique identity with me. First of all, notice that:

A. It is a shared identity

1. While our Lord's identity is unique, it is also shared. I know that sounds like a contradiction, but if you read the Old Testament you find this same title, "the first and the last", being used.

2. For instance, in Isaiah 41:4, Jehovah, the Creator and God of Israel said, "*Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he.*"

3. Again in Isaiah 44:6, it says, "*Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.*"

4. Once more in Isaiah 48:12, we read, "Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last."

5. So this identity that Jesus claims for Himself in Revelation 1 is the same identity that the Lord God Jehovah claimed for Himself in the Old Testament.

6. What does this mean? It means that Jesus is God! As Jesus said in John 10:30, "*I and my Father are one.*"

7. His identity as "the first and the last" is one He shares with the eternal Godhead.

8. S.D. Gordon said, "Jesus is God spelling Himself out in language that man can understand." He *is* God, and shares His identity with Him!

9. As you consider His unique identity, notice not only that it is a shared identity, but notice also further that:

B. It is a supreme identity

1. Again, Jesus chose in this text to identify Himself by the title, "the first and the last". It is a similar title to the one He used earlier in this chapter when He said in verse 11, "*I am Alpha and Omega...*" Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and Omega is the last.

2. Jesus is pointing us here to something about Himself as the beginning and ending of all things.

3. As I studied over this phrase, I found something that helped me to understand what exactly Jesus means by this title.

4. Writing during the 1100's a monk named Richard of St. Victor said this about our text:

"I am the first and the last. First through creation, last through retribution. First, because before me a God was not formed; last, because after me there shall not be another. First, because all things are from me; last, because all things are to me; from me the beginning, to me the end..."ⁱ

5. In other words, it all started with Jesus and it all ends with Jesus. *From* Him the universe came into existence, and *to* Him the universe is headed.

6. His is the unique, supreme identity as the One who started it all, and the One who will be there when it is all over.

7. He is the creation and He is the culmination! He is the prelude and the postlude! He is the first and the last!

8. With that in mind, we look on this text, and we see that Jesus speaks not only of *His unique identity*, but He also speaks about:

II. HIS UNIQUE VITALITY

1. By vitality, I am referring to His life, which He described in verse 18 when He said, "*I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen...*"

2. Of all the lives that have ever been lived, none has a story quite like Jesus. His is a singular and unique life.

3. The old writer, A.T. Pierson said, "He stands alone in history; in teaching, in example, in character, an exception [and] a marvel..."

4. Consider what Jesus says about his unique vitality in this text. He points us to:

A. His existence as the life

1. Notice that phrase, "*I am he that liveth...*" It can be translated as "the living one." The language indicates a continual, unending life.

2. We know from the teaching of the New Testament that Jesus had no beginning. He always existed in eternity past, long before time began.

3. Though He was born in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago, His birth was not His beginning. He was alive before He was born.

4. In John 5:26, Jesus said, "*For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.*"

5. You and I have life in us, but it did not come from ourselves. Someone had to give us life.

6. Jesus, on the other hand, has life in Himself! He needed no one to make Him come alive! In Him *is* life! He exists as the life. He said, "I am...the life." (John 11:25; John 14:6)

7. Notice not only His existence as the life, but He also describes for us here:

B. His exit as the Lamb

1. Though Jesus has in Himself continual, unending life, He says in verse 18, *"I am he that liveth, and was dead..."*
2. He that was eternal became mortal and died. This statement points us clearly to Christ's death on the cross.
3. It is interesting that the word translated "was" literally means "to become". Jesus said, "I became dead."
4. We often think that the Jews and the Romans killed Jesus; that He died at their hands when they hung Him on a cross.
5. Yet, in John 10:18, Jesus said, *"No man taketh [my life] from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."*
6. As the Lamb of God, Jesus willingly *became* dead for the sake of our sins. He that had always lived laid down His life for the sake of those who were dead in their sins.
7. The story of His life is totally unique, and so is the story of His death! He points us here not only to His existence as the life, and His exit as the Lamb, but also His unique vitality is seen in:

C. His eternity as the Lord

1. I heard Vance Havner say in one of His sermons, "The only thing Jesus ever *was* was dead, and He's not that anymore."
2. Look again at His words in verse 18. He said, *"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen..."*
3. John knew that Jesus had died. He stood by the cross and watched Him breathe His last breath. Now Jesus says, "Look, John, I am not dead any longer. I am alive forevermore!"
4. The word "forevermore" is translated from a phrase that means, "to the ages of the ages." As the eons of time roll on, there will never come a day when Jesus is not alive!
5. Our text indicates that even Jesus thought that truth was worthy of an "Amen!" He died once, but He rose from dead never to die again!
6. What does this mean for us? Well, only One who exists as the life, and has eternal life in Himself can give eternal life to those who are dead! Because He lives, we shall live also!

7. Someone once wrote a piece about Jesus entitled, "One Solitary Life". The writer said:

"Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the Child of a peasant woman...for three years He was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never owned a home. He never had a family. He never went to college...He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where He was born...He had no credentials but Himself. He had nothing to do with this world except the naked power of His Divine manhood."

8. The writer goes on to say that:

"...all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever were built, all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as that One Solitary Life."ⁱⁱ

9. In describing His one solitary life, Jesus reminds us that no one has ever lived as He does. His is a unique life!

10. Looking again at our text, Jesus describes for us not only *His unique identity*, and *His unique vitality*, but notice also thirdly that we see:

III. HIS UNIQUE AUTHORITY

1. Look again at verse 18. Jesus said, "*I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.*"

2. When Jesus spoke to John in this chapter, He had a set of keys in His hand. He said they were the keys to hell and death.

3. The word translated "hell" is not the word for the place of fire. That is "Gehenna". This is the word "hades" and it refers not just to hell, but to the place of the dead. Some translators render it as "the grave".

4. Having these keys means that Jesus has authority over these things. He has authority over death and the world beyond death.

5. Consider these keys with me. First of all, consider:

A. His possession of these keys

1. As Jesus jangled these keys before John, He was assuring John of His authority over the after-life and eternity.

2. The question arises, how did He get these keys? How did Jesus come into possession of this great authority over death and what follows it?
3. In some ways, it is rightfully His because He is God. To Him belong the issues of death.
4. Yet, Jesus also came into possession of these keys because of His victory over death and hell.
5. Charles Spurgeon said, "He hath the keys of death and hell because he hath actually conquered both these powers...[He wrestled] with those evil powers upon the cross, and in that thick midday midnight...in the midst of that darkness he continued still to fight, his heel bruised, but breaking meanwhile the dragon's head. Grim was the contest, but glorious was the victory!"ⁱⁱⁱⁱ
6. Death came into the world because of sin. Sin came into the world because of Satan, for whom Hell has been prepared.
7. When Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, He conquered sin, Satan, and hell itself, and in so doing He took the keys to eternity as the spoil of His victory!
8. Death and hell may have once reigned like tyrants over humanity, but they have both been conquered, and there is a Champion who now holds their power.
9. That leads us to another truth regarding these keys. Consider not only His possession of these keys, but consider also:

B. His power with these keys

1. Look back at what Jesus initially said to John in verse 17. Before He identified Himself as "the first and the last", He said, "*Fear not...*"
2. John had fallen out in fear, but Jesus told him to fear not. He had the keys of death and hell in His hands.
3. Because He holds the keys, those who know Him and trust Him have no need to fear death and what follows it.
4. While believers may pass through the black gate of death, we know who the Gatekeeper is. He holds the keys to our eternity, and He has opened the door to heaven for all those who trust in Him.
5. On the other hand, those who do not know Jesus must recognize that their only hope of escaping hell is by coming to the One who has the keys!

6. Only Jesus can save you! Only Jesus can give you eternal life in heaven. He alone holds the keys, and you must deal with Him if you would have any hope for eternity!

7. I quote Spurgeon again. He said, "Heaven is a place of eternal safety. There the gates shall be fast shut...But, alas! There is the dark side of this shutting of the gate. It is Christ, who, with his key shall shut the gates of heaven against unbelievers."^{iv}

8. The power of these keys is the power to open up heaven, but it is also the power to turn into hell. All of that authority belongs to no one but Jesus, the keeper of the keys.

1. In one of his sermons, the fiery, American evangelist, Billy Sunday once said, "There are 256 names given in the Bible for the Lord Jesus Christ, and I suppose this was because He is infinitely beyond all that any one name could express."

2. There is a sense in which no single scripture can capture the full truth of who Jesus is. He is bigger than any single text, and greater than any one verse.

3. Yet, in Revelation 1, Jesus describes Himself in terms that point us to the great truths about Him.

4. He is God, the first and the last. He is the One who lives, yet became dead, only to rise never to die again.

5. He holds the keys of authority over death and the eternity that follows it. When we come to Him, He saves us from our sins, and unlocks for us the door to heaven.

6. Understanding all that He is, no wonder we worship Him! Who else would we worship? There ain't nobody like Jesus!

ⁱ Quoted by, Vincent, Marvin R., Word Studies in the New Testament, (Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1977), p. 432

ⁱⁱ Quoted by, Swindoll, Charles, The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart, (Word Publishing, Nashville, 1998), p. 316-317

ⁱⁱⁱ Spurgeon, Charles, "Christ with the Keys of Death and Hell", 1869, *WORDsearch*

^{iv} Ibid