

“To Him Who Loves Us”

Revelation 1:4-8

Intro: Last week we began our study of the book of Revelation by noting that this is a letter from God, hand-delivered by an angel, and given to the church as a revelation – a revealing of things previously unseen. God pulls back the veil between time and eternity and gives us a view of things as they really are.

I remember as a little guy taking class trips to places like The Grand Rapids Press and the Kellogg’s Cereal company. It was fascinating to see ‘behind the scenes’ – to see what was hidden from the general public.

Revelation gives us a view behind the veil – a view of the spiritual realities that undergird the things we see taking place on earth. When we read the newspaper or wars and rumors of wars, when we read of cataclysmic natural disasters, when we read the Chinese government arresting and imprisoning Christians because they are belong to Jesus, when we read of legislators in New York clapping and cheering over the legal freedom to murder their unborn and newly born children – we are just seeing the tip of the iceberg. We are seeing the outward manifestation of a great, underlying spiritual warfare.

Ephesians 6:12 *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

But the great blessing of Revelation is not the unique insight we receive into the spiritual realm – the great blessing is the view we have of King Jesus who is, right now, actively ruling and reigning over all things; accomplishing his Sovereign saving purposes for our eternal benefit and God’s eternal glory! Jesus reveals himself to us in these pages, just as he revealed himself to his disciples following his resurrection. And His purpose is to convince us of His redemptive accomplishment, comfort us with his sovereign power and call us to engage in His mission. Revelation is more like a shot in the arm than a pat on the head. It is not meant merely to calm our fears. It is meant to equip the church to live as the church. To equip us to shine as lampstands, broadcasting the glory of God’s truth and grace and life into the darkness of this present evil age. Everything in this book is intended to that end. And everything hinges on seeing Jesus.

I. The Address

“John to the seven churches that are in Asia:”

John, of course, is the Apostle John. Most likely near 90 years old. He is on the island of Patmos, a small prison island about 50 miles off the coast of Greece in the Aegean Sea. Patmos was a place of exile for Roman prisoners and John has been banished there “on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” In other words, this is a letter written by a man on the front lines of the conflict between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of this world.

It is addressed to “the 7 churches that are in Asia”, and in chapters 2-3 we have individual letters addressed to 7 individual churches. But it is clear that the letters and this book are not intended merely for these specific churches but for the church of all time and in all places.

1. The number 7 is a symbolic number that stands for fullness and completion. We will see it many times in this letter: 7 seals, 7 angels with 7 trumpets, 7 plagues, 7 bowls of divine wrath. It is the number of fullness and completion reflecting Gods' act of creation where he made the world in 6 days and rested on the 7th.
2. We also know that there were more than 7 churches in Asia at the time – Hierapolis and Colossae. Certainly, they weren't meant to be excluded from this revelation.
3. The last four letters show they are addressed to all those who hear.
2:29 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

In other words, this letter is for US – the church of Jesus Christ here and now. This is a letter for Harvest Church. This is a revelation for you and me. Jesus is talking to us in these words and pages as really and truly as though he were speaking them audibly in our ears right before our very eyes. As we study this book we are hearing the voice of Jesus and are responsible to respond in faith and obedience. Jesus isn't playing games here. Since He himself is speaking to us in these words – we must 'hear' or we will bring the judgements revealed here upon our heads.

II. The Greeting

⁴ ...Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

The greeting begins with a classic apostolic greeting "Grace to you and peace." The words echo the glorious promises of the gospel – the grace of God in Jesus for sinners and the peace of God for all those who have come to believe in Him.

In this greeting we come across another prominent and important number in this revelation – the number 3 – the number that represents God. There are three sets of three in vs 4-5.

- The Name of God - "Him who is, and who was, and who is to come"
- The Triune Nature of God: Father, Spirit and the Son.
- The glory of Jesus:
 - The faithful witness
 - The firstborn of the dead
 - The ruler of the kings on earth.

There is a reason for this triplicate of threes. John, in his greeting, is doing all that he can to impress upon his readers the omnipotent, omniscient, all-pervasive, all-encompassing, all-sufficient, glory of God! In one sense, it is the point of the entire letter – to get us to see the present, engaged reality of God in all his glory and all his saving might. Why? Because the key to perseverance and joy and fruitfulness in this life is a deep, abiding, cognizance of the reality of God and all that God is for us in Jesus Christ! The first and necessary foundational conviction of Christianity is theism! There is a God!

Hebrew 11:6 "Whoever comes to God must believe that He exists! – and that he rewards those who earnestly seek after him."

John Wooden, the famous coach of the UCLA Bruins basketball team used to begin each new season by gathering the team at center court. He would hold a basketball in front of them and say, "Gentlemen, this is a basketball." In other words, "we are going to begin at the beginning. We're going to lay a foundation." And on that foundation he built champions.

The foundation for the Christian life is the knowledge of God. Gods' complaint against Israel was "My people do not understand and know me." That was the fatal flaw. The essence of worldliness is not sexual immorality and materialism. The essence of worldliness is a blindness to the sheer reality and glory of God. The sins are simply the evidence of that blindness. Conversely, the foundation of a life that glorifies God is true, deep awareness of God! And the greeting reveals Him.

A. "From Him who is, and who was, and who is to come"

This is a three-fold title comes from God's self-revelation in Exodus 3 where he revealed himself to Moses as "I AM who I Am". And here, in the present, past and future senses of the verb 'to be', God reveals that His sovereign existence encompasses and enfolds all the history of this world. He stands astride human history, ordaining and ruling over every second of time.

Beale writes that this title is used "to describe God, not merely as present in the beginning, middle and end of history, but as the incomparable, sovereign Lord over history, who is thus able to bring prophecy to fulfilment and to deliver his people ...whether from Egypt, Babylon or the nations." (188)

God wants us to remember who He is, to remember His eternal nature and infinite power and limitless glory – all for his glory and our good.

B. "And from the 7 Spirits which are before His Throne".

7, again, is the number of fullness, completion. The Spirit of God is fully engaged in this world, perfectly accomplishing the will of God and unfolding the redemptive victory of King Jesus. This is the Spirit which was poured out on the church to unite us to Christ Jesus and equip us for his mission and present us, finally, without spot in the glory of heaven.

C. "From Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth."

There is so much glorious truth about Jesus here!

1. The Faithful Witness

Each word matters.

The – Jesus is not simply one of many faithful witnesses. He is THE witness.

I am "THE way, THE truth, THE life."

If you **know me**, you know the Father. If you have **seen me** you have seen the Father.

He is The Faithful witness to the truth of God and the purposes of God. The only way God can be truly known is by listening to His Son.

Faithful witness. He is faithful in two ways.

a) Every word he speaks is entirely true. The courts of this world are full of people every day who bear witness. But even the best witness's fail to speak the perfect truth. Every word that

came from Jesus mouth was the perfect and true word for that occasion and for the glory of the Father. No wonder the people exclaimed: “Never a man spake as this man!” (John 7:46)

b) He was faithful even unto death. In this book we will see that faithfulness is directly related to suffering. Jesus was a faithful witness in that he maintained his witness through great temptation and great suffering. He was faithful all the way to the grave.

And as the Master, so must the servant be. One of the reasons John wants us to see Jesus as the faithful witness is because we are also called to follow him as faithful witnesses – and it will cost us. John speaks from first-hand knowledge. He is the last living disciple. As best we know, all the rest were martyred for the faith. And John is in exile, as a 90-year-old man, because he was a faithful witness.

One of the most powerful and moving statements in this book is found in Revelation 12, speaking of victory of the saints over the Devil.

Revelation 12:11 And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, *for they loved not their lives even unto death.*

Isn't that a great line? “They loved not their lives even unto death.” Oh, how I want that to be true for me, and for you.

Last fall Joanne and I had a chance to go to the 9-11 memorial in downtown Manhattan. There were pictures there of the firemen who bravely walked up into the inferno and lost their lives. There was a testimony there from a lady who met a young fireman as she was making her way out of the building – he was heading in. She said he looked about 19 years old. She begged him not to go up. He had his whole life ahead of him. She told him there was nothing he could do to help, if he went up he would die. But he said, I have to go, it's my job. He loved not his life even unto death.

John is writing to a church that was facing an aggressive, threatening world. The Emperor Domitian was putting Christians to death in gruesome ways. The Greco-Roman culture was a powerful force, tempting the believers to compromise their faith. In the face of these grave dangers – John writes to encourage them to stand, to fulfill their calling and triumph by their testimony. Even unto death. And it's not a hard ask because Christ has conquered death.

2. “The Firstborn from the Dead”

Christians believe the most amazing thing. We believe that Jesus died – and in dying, he conquered death. The evidence of his victory is the historically verifiable reality of his resurrection! He was raised never to die again. He was raised as the first fruit of the new creation. His resurrection guarantees the resurrection of all those who belong to Him. Consequently – Christians are in the incredible position of not needing to fear death. It is a foe – but a conquered foe. The gate has been opened for us into that heavenly city. The door into the new heaven and new earth has been flung open wide – and we are not merely invited to enter, we are promised we will enter! We are guaranteed to enter! Why? The Savior who died for us now reigns as sovereign Lord over all.

3. “Ruler of the kings of the earth”

He reigns with sovereign power and authority and wisdom over every king on earth and every demonic ruler of hell.

⁸“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

One of the greatest blessings of this letter is a repeating vision of King Jesus on His throne.

III. The Doxology

This is one of the most precious doxologies in all of Scripture.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ⁶and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

It is precious because of the great comfort and encouragement it gives to God’s children.

A. To Him Who Loves Us.

This is the believer’s comfort and joy – particularly in times of temptation or trial. John has just presented us with the marvelous, sovereign power of God. In verse 8 we see that Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, the Almighty! It’s wonderful! But it’s wonderful only if and only because he loves us.

When we are afraid, it isn’t really the power of God that we struggle with, is it? I’ve never met a trembling child of God who was struggling to believe that God was able to help. Have you ever laid awake in your bed, wrestling with your fears and saying to yourself – “I don’t think God has the power to fix this”? The challenge is to believe He is willing. We see our sin, we sense his holiness – and we struggle to believe that God is willing to help. Isn’t that true? Why would he help a poor, stubborn, sinner like me?

To him who loves us. **Present tense.** He loves us right now, right this moment. And he wants us to know it. The story of redemption is a story of love. The essential experience of the Christian is an experience of being loved: being treasured and cherished and cared for.

It is an amazing thing to be loved. Do you know how I know my wife loves me? When I walk into the house she smiles the most cheerful, gracious, kind smile at me. It says she’s happy to see me, and she is completely for me. It’s a wonderful gift. I don’t deserve it. She does it because she loves me.

Can you imagine Jesus smiling at you because he loves you? Can you imagine his heart being full of a cheerful, gracious, kind delight in you? Can you imagine Jesus anticipating spending eternity with you? I don’t mean any of that in sentimental terms. I mean that with the deepest, holiest, reverence I know. In his final prayer before he died, recorded in John 17 Jesus said, *“Father I desire that they, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me....”*

To him who loves us. God is telling you that he has set his affections on you. That’s why he gave you to Jesus. And Jesus loved you and gave his life for you.

And has freed us from our sins by his blood.... He did not merely set his affections on us – he saved us! He freed us from our sins – **past tense!** Accomplished action! If the Son sets you free – you are free indeed! And Jesus has set you free from your sin!

Once again, I am struck by this single gospel note played all through the Bible. What did Jesus accomplish for us on the cross? You'd be surprised how often and easily this gets missed.

The health and wealth teacher will say Jesus defeated the forces of evil so that we now have access, by faith, to material riches and freedom from pain and sickness. That's not true.

The typical evangelical American will say that Jesus died to show us how valuable we are to God – and now reigns in order to help us live happy, fulfilled lives. That's not true.

Here's the gospel. The one and only gospel in all the Bible and all the world. Jesus freed us from **our sins - by his blood**. In other words, the great tragedy of mankind is not poverty, or pain or oppression. The great tragedy of mankind – is sin, our sin. The sin with our name on it. The sin that bound us to death and doomed us to everlasting hell – away from the presence of God.

This is the great crisis of every man, woman and child born in Adam – we have sinned against this holy God and are justly under a sentence of condemnation and wrath and death.

This is what we will see in the book of Revelation – the Holy wrath of Almighty God being poured out on all those bound in sin. Look at verse 7:

⁷ Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

O, the misery and terror of that day. This is the terror and tragedy Jesus resolved on the cross. He suffered the wrath of God on that day – so we could be freed from our sins by his blood. This is the great work of Jesus. This is the theme of the songs of the saints.

Revelation 5:9–10 *And they sang a new song, saying,*

*“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.”*

By his blood, he freed us from our sin....

“And made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father,”

We have become the people of God. Made citizens of His eternal kingdom. Called to serve as priests in his presence – offering up the sacrifice of worship and praise. And all the songs have the same refrain..... **“To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”**