

CHRIST IS GLORIOUS IN WHO HE IS, REVELATION 1:4-6

Let's turn in our Bibles, please, to the book of Revelation chapter 1. We're going to be looking at verses 4 to 6 today. In Revelation chapter 1 and verse 4 it says:

“⁴ John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, ⁶ and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

We saw in our previous study in this section that the book of Revelation was addressed to the Christian church as a whole, represented symbolically by these seven churches in Asia. You remember in verse 4, John says “John to the seven churches which are in Asia.” In verse 11, Jesus says, “What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia.”

Now we know there were many more churches in Asia than just seven, and yet we said the number seven is used symbolically throughout the Scriptures as a number representing completeness. These seven churches represent the complete church of Jesus Christ all through the New Covenant era, between the first and the second comings of our Lord Jesus Christ. So it is written to every individual local church, in whatever age and whatever era they have lived in.

We then saw that John offered a prayer to God on behalf of the churches that God would give them ongoing supplies of grace and peace; that is, that He would give them His ongoing applications of the saving work of Jesus Christ in their lives, that He would give them sanctification and He would give them preservation.

We saw that he prayed for peace for them, that they would have that inward tranquility and quietness of spirit that is a result of knowing that one is fully reconciled to God and under the providential care of God, even though there is severe persecution and chaos outside of ourselves.

So this wonderful prayer of grace and peace was offered on behalf of each of the churches and all of the churches. These things are needed as they face the persecution and the spiritual warfare that are the result of living for Christ and serving Christ.

But the question then arises, of course, Where is this grace and where is this peace going to come from? Who is going to supply it? John tells us that this grace and this peace are given to us by the Father and by the Spirit and by Jesus Christ. This blessing of grace and peace is a Trinitarian blessing.

John gives us, then, brief descriptions of the Father. He says of the Father that He is the one which is and which was and is to come. And he gives us a brief description of the Holy Spirit. It says of Him that He is the seven Spirits which are before the throne of God; once again, the number seven being used symbolically to speak of the completeness and the fullness of the work of the Holy Spirit in all of His operations and activities, under the New Covenant, as manifested initially in the Day of Pentecost, and then in an ongoing fashion in filling all of the people of God, not only with His presence and His power, but also with His gifts. And He carries out that ministry from the throne, that is, under the direction of the sovereign will and instruction of God the Father.

Then we saw a very full description given to us of the third person of the Trinity indicated here, that is, the Lord Jesus Christ. While John gives us a brief description of the Father and a brief description of the Spirit, John gives us a very full description of Jesus Christ, both in who He is and in what He has done. This is contained in verses 5 and 6. And while he gives a phrase to the Father and a phrase to the Spirit, he gives two full verses of descriptive terminology to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Last week as we were handling this section as a unit, we touched very briefly on the sixfold description given to us of Jesus Christ in verses 5 and 6, and we barely scratched the surface of the significance of what was said about Christ. What I want to do today, and God willing next week as well, is to explain more fully the glorious things that are said about Jesus Christ in verses 5 and 6. This week we will consider together that Christ is glorious in who He is. Then next week, God willing, we will consider together that Christ is glorious in what He has done.

This week, we want to consider together that Christ is glorious in who He is, and this is related to us in verse 5a, when it says, “and from Jesus Christ, who *is* the faithful witness, and [who is] the first begotten of the dead, and [who is] the prince of the kings of the earth.” These three descriptive statements are given regarding who Jesus Christ is. It is imperative that we not just worship someone who has the phonetic symbol, Jesus Christ, attached to him, but that we understand who in fact this person described by this phonetic symbol is.

So many people run around today and they say, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus! Worship Jesus! Follow Jesus! Love Jesus! But they never identify who that Jesus is. You see, when worshiping and following a Jesus, just a phonetic symbol that is undefined in his identity and in his activity, you could very easily wind up worshiping an idol of your own imagination, or of cultural consensus, rather than the God who is revealed in the Scriptures themselves. So it’s imperative for us not to use the word “Jesus” without identifying, in particular, who this person is.

Having said that, this passage is not exhaustive in its description of who Jesus is, nor is it exhaustive in its description, as we shall see next week, of what Jesus has done. But it does give us major leading, dominant thoughts about who Jesus is, and as we understand these three descriptors that are given of Him, we form a very balanced and a very large and full picture of

the identity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us, then, look at this threefold description in verse 5 of who Jesus is and consider it together in more detail.

In the first place then this morning, let us consider together that Jesus is the faithful witness. Notice if you will verse 5. It says, “⁵ and from”—that is, this grace and peace are—“from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness.”

Now a witness is someone who has seen something, and therefore has a message to tell. We have this in courts of law, don't we? We call witnesses to the stand. And who are these people? They've seen something and they are therefore going to bear testimony to what they have seen or heard. But the trouble with many witnesses is that they do not tell the truth in their witness. Their testimony cannot be relied upon because it does not correspond with reality; they are lying or they are misinformed or they are mistaken, so their testimony cannot be relied upon, and if it is relied upon, the result is disaster for those who trust in it, because they are relying upon a falsehood. It says in Proverbs 14 and verse 5, “A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies.” So there are two kinds of witnesses, aren't there? There are faithful witnesses and there are false witnesses.

Notice in our passage, Jesus is called “the faithful witness,” and as we know from Proverbs 14:5, “A faithful witness”—what?—“will not lie.” So Jesus never lies in the witness that He bears. Jesus declared in John 18 and verse 37, “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.” Christ had this selfconscious awareness of His purpose and mission in the world, and He says, I was explicitly born to bear witness to the truth. So Christ is a faithful witness who bears witness *only* to the truth and *always* to the truth and *ever* to the truth, and never tells anything but the truth.

In contrast to that, the world is full of false witnesses. Satan comes along and says, If you eat of the tree, you shall surely not die. Science comes along and says, You evolved up out of the slime. God didn't create you. Humanism comes along and says, Mankind is intrinsically good and can function autonomously and independently of any concept or awareness of God. Feminism comes along and says, It's perfectly fine to kill your unborn child. Philosophy comes along and says, You can decide for yourself what's right or wrong; you can create your own ethical and moral system. False religion comes along and says, Good works will gain you acceptance before God.

All of these false witnesses will deceive and will destroy those who trust in their witness. But Jesus Christ is the faithful witness, and those who hear and who follow His testimony will find themselves following the truth every step of the way. His witness does not arise out of hearsay, it does not arise out of speculative guesses; but rather, it arises out of direct personal knowledge and direct personal experience with that of which He is bearing witness.

In John 1:18, it says, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” Now you can't bear witness to something that you

haven't seen, and no man has seen God. But Jesus not only has seen Him, He has the most intimate of personal relationships with Him, described under this metaphor of resting against the chest of the Father. And it is out of that experience that Jesus Christ bears witness to, and declares the identity of, God Himself. Jesus had a personal intimate acquaintance with the person He bore witness to, and Jesus had a personal knowledge of the truth that He preached, and Jesus represented them both with absolute faithfulness in His life and in His teaching.

So the Savior that we worship is one who is absolutely trustworthy, and one who is utterly reliable in all that He promises and in all that He teaches; therefore, we do not ever need to fear being led astray if we but follow His teachings and His word.

You know, I constantly think to myself, as I hear every day about Muslims who blow themselves up for Allah, I wonder what they think when they wake up in hell and recognize that they followed a false witness and laid down their lives on the basis of a false witness. That will never be the outcome or the experience of those who follow the "faithful witness."

It is the greatest of all comforts to know that we are not believing in and trusting in a false system and a false savior, as we face eternity. Knowing that Christ has faithfully told the truth about life and death, about heaven and hell, about God and salvation, fills us with security and it fills us with certainty. So whatever Jesus says about whatever issue He addresses in whatever way He addresses it can be absolutely relied upon as being absolute, infallible, inerrant truth, because He is the faithful witness.

The second thing we see about the Lord Jesus is not only is He the faithful witness, but secondly notice, Jesus is the first begotten from the dead. Verse 5: "and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead." Now this of course is a reference to His resurrection. The fact of His resurrection makes it clear that the truth He bore witness to was not vain and useless information. He's the faithful witness.

But what did He bear witness to? Well the answer is, He bore witness to something that was so significant that it can result in your resurrection from the dead. Is that significant? You may know the exact truth about exactly how many grains of sand there are on the seashore. But what good is that information? What value does it have to you? Will it help you in any way? The answer is, No, it's absolutely vain and useless information. But the truth that Christ conveyed and the truth that Christ bore witness to is the truth that has the power to conquer death—now *that* is useful and valuable information. The truth that He has born witness to, and the work that He did on our behalf, secured and accomplished victory over death.

You know, if somebody comes along and says, You know, I can tell you the truth about how many dresses there are in Kim Kardashian's closet, your response would probably be, I could care less! That information has no value to me. In fact, I don't even want to talk about her! But if someone comes along and says to you, I can tell you how you can have victory over the grave, resurrection from death, and eternal life in heaven—*that* has value to you.

Jesus Christ is not only the faithful witness, but He's the faithful witness to information that is of infinite eternal value, and that's why we need to listen to His witness. The truth that He bore witness to and the work He did on our behalf secured and accomplished victory over death. And the good news is, He did not merely do this for Himself. He didn't just raise Himself from the dead. Our text says specifically that He is the first begotten of the dead; that is, there are yet many more to come who will rise from the grave, victorious over death.

In other words, Jesus Christ, as the first begotten of the dead, stands at the head of a procession of those who will rise from the grave—a procession so large and so great, the Scripture says, that no man can number them. In our Scripture reading this morning, in Acts chapter 26, as Paul is speaking here in verse 23, it says that Christ should suffer and that He should be the *first* that should rise from the dead and should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles. Aren't you glad it doesn't say that He is the *only* that should rise from the dead? When it says He's the "first," the clear implication is that there are going to be lots and lots after Him.

You know, when you go up to somebody and you say, What's the birth order in your family? And they say, Well, I was born first, the very clear implication is that they have brothers and sisters that were born after them. But if they say, Well, I'm the only child of my parents, you know there's no more, right?

So when they use this word "first," the clear implication is that there are many others to follow after. So Jesus as the *first* begotten of the dead stands at the head of a procession of those who will subsequently rise from the dead, and as I said, a procession so great and so large that, as the Scripture says, is a multitude which no man can number, of every kindred, tongue, tribe, and nation, gathered before the throne.

To think of victory over death in the abstract may perhaps be of little comfort. But when you stand staring into the grave of a loved one, or more compelling yet, when you are staring death in the face yourself, to have the Lord who has conquered death, to have the Lord who has obtained victory over death, makes Christ an incomparably glorious Lord, and the witness that He bears incomparably valuable. His resurrection is a pattern and a pledge of our resurrection. And because He has dealt fully with the cause of death, which is sin, He has fully conquered death itself.

Furthermore, His resurrection from the dead not only secures our resurrection from the dead, but His resurrection from the dead proves His divinity—that He is God. Romans chapter 1 and verse 4 says that he was "declared to be the Son of God...by the resurrection from the dead." It is the resurrection from the dead that sets Christ apart from all other religious teachers and leaders that have ever lived or ever will live on the face of the earth. No other religious leader has ever risen from the grave and thereby proven that he has conquered death, but Christ has risen, and thereby has proven that He has conquered death. This makes Christ a glorious Lord.

It sets Him infinitely above anyone who would claim to be a substitute for him or a superior to Him.

Mohammad claims to be the last and the greatest of the prophets, and that Jesus is somewhere behind and beneath him. And so, of course, Mohammad had to deny the resurrection because if Jesus rose from the grave and Mohammad didn't, who is the greater prophet? Who has the greater claim to being the spokesman for God, indeed, of being the very Son of God? Christ is the faithful witness. Mohammad is the lying witness.

Jesus said in John chapter 10, verses 17 and 18, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. ¹⁸ 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." Now Jesus made that claim while He was alive, walking on the face of the earth, and who else could back up such a claim with the kind of proof that He supplied by not only laying down His life, but by taking it up again in the resurrection?

You know, lots of people have laid down their lives; they just haven't taken them back up again, right? And this is what separates Christ from all others. When we remember His resurrection and that He is the first of many that He shall raise from the dead, then this fills us with comfort and peace and hope as we face every day the possibility of death and the reality of death, especially at the hands of persecutors, as the people in Revelation were facing, and every generation since then has faced. Our Lord has conquered death, and what our Lord has achieved we will enjoy as His servants.

It says in First Corinthians 15, verses 20 and 23, "²⁰ But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept... ²³ But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." Clearly, He is the first begotten from the dead. He is, as we saw in Acts, the first that should rise from the dead. Here we see He's the firstfruits of the dead.

Ever and always and repeatedly, the Scriptures declare that the resurrection of Christ is the declaration that behind Him and after Him, a multitude of people are going to be raised from the dead. The firstfruit, that first apple that comes ripe on the tree, is the promise that there shall be many more that shall come ripe and follow after it. And so Christ, being the firstfruit from the grave, is the promise there shall be many more after Him that shall arise.

So this is the second great truth that we are told about Jesus Christ. Not only is he the faithful witness, He is the first begotten from the dead. He has conquered death, not only for Himself but for the multitudes that follow Him, and in the defeat of death is the demonstration of the fact that He Himself is declared to be God the Son.

The third and final thing we see that this passage tells us about the Lord Jesus is not only is He the faithful witness; not only is He the first begotten of the dead; but thirdly, notice it says He is

“the prince of the kings of the earth.” He’s the prince of the kings of the earth. What this tells us is that Christ rules over the whole creation by His authority and by His power and by His position. Whatever earthly authorities there may be, whatever kings or presidents or prime ministers or potentates there are, our passage asserts that Christ has authority over them all, and He rules over them all. He has obtained this authority from God Himself as a reward for His obedience to Him in His redemptive work.

You recall in the book of Psalms, it says in Psalm 2, “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?” Notice: “²The kings of the earth set themselves...together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, ³Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.” So we have all the kings of the earth in confederacy with each other, taking counsel together and saying, Let us cast off and destroy any notion of God, any law of God, any commandment of God. Let *us* be god. And this is the cry and the message of humanism that arose to its loudest pitch in the socalled “Enlightenment,” in which there was a stream of apostates who proclaimed the supremacy of man and the death of God. But “⁴He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.” He that sits in the heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall have them in derision. And what does He set in opposition to these kings of the earth? The answer is, He sets His own King in opposition to them.

He says in verse 6, “I set *my* king upon my holy hill of Zion. ⁷I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. ⁸Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. ⁹Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel. ¹⁰Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. ¹¹Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. ¹²Kiss 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.”

Psalm 2 is a declaration of the fact that God the Father has taken God the Son and set Him as King over all the kings of the earth, and the counsel to those kings is: Bow down and kiss the feet of the Son in submission and in obedience, lest He take His rod and smash you into pieces and utterly destroy you from the earth.

After Christ’s resurrection, Christ declared in Matthew 28 and verse 18, that “All power [authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” And this is when God set His King upon His holy hill of Zion. Christ is now the King of all the kings and the Lord of all of the lords. He has all authority and He is above everything.

Let’s talk a little further about the nature of this rule that Jesus has. First of all, it’s a universal rule. That is, it extends to every institution. In government, we see that the king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord and He turns it wherever He wills, just as He does the rivers of water. He is King over the church. Jesus Christ is the head of the church. And He is King over the family. We’re told Christ is the head of every man, and thus, the head of every home.

And not only does this rule, this universal rule, extend to every institution—be it the government, the church, or the family—it extends to every individual. It extends to the saved, by right of purchase. It extends to the lost, by right of creation. It extends to the angels and to the demons.

It not only extends to every institution and every individual, it extends to every circumstance. Jesus Christ manages all the affairs of Providence, and He works all things after the counsel of His own will, and everything together for the good of His people. We read in Philippians 2, verses 9 to 11, that God has “⁹ highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; ¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”

So the rule of Jesus is a universal rule. Secondly, it’s a righteous rule. That is, the Judge of all the earth always does what is right. One of the things we are withering under right now as a nation is an unrighteous rule by a wicked president and congress and court. But Jesus Christ always rules according to perfect justice. He does what is right and He requires that those He rules do what is right, as well. In His administration there is no corruption, there is no deceit, and there is no fraud.

But thirdly, we see it’s not only a universal rule and a righteous rule, it’s an everlasting rule. Our presidents and our congressmen and our courts come and go, because of elections and because of death. The sad thing is is that when you get a righteous man in, he eventually terms out or he dies out. But this will never be the case with Jesus Christ.

In Hebrews 1 and verse 8, to the Son, God the Father says, “Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.” The rule of Christ is an everlasting rule, it is a righteous rule, and it is a universal rule. Christ is the Prince of the kings of the earth, so that from Him they have their authority, and by Him they are directed and overruled, and to Him they will be held accountable. As First Peter 3:22 says, He “is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.”

To remember that Christ is the Prince of the kings of the earth fills us with comfort and peace and hope. Though our nation is in turmoil, though our world is in conflict, though the threat of war is everpresent, we can be secure in the knowledge that all is overruled by Christ, all is managed by Christ for the good of His people, for the establishment of His kingdom, and for the glory of His wonderful person.

Christ will work all things together for good for His people, and therefore we do not fear the evil intentions of civil governments, or corrupt police, or murderous religions, or any other authority. We do not fear them because we rest secure in the fact that, number one, our King rules over all other kings, and all His good, just, and righteous purposes will be accomplished in this world. And, number two, we are secure in the fact that we are under the protection and the care and the benevolent rule of this King, and we have a good and wise and powerful and gracious King

ruling over us, which is the greatest of all conceivable blessings. He rules all other kings, He rules us, in an infinitely perfect way for infinitely perfect ends to bring an infinitely perfect blessing in our lives.

This, then, is who Christ is. As the faithful witness, He is our prophet. To hear His voice is to hear and know the truth. As the first begotten from the dead, He is our priest, who by His sacrifice for sin secured our victory over death by His victory over death, and reconciled us to God. As the Prince of the kings of the earth, He is our king, who by His rule provides His people with a perfect security and with a perfect peace and with a certain outcome and an expected end.

From Him we receive the truth that leads to eternal life, because He is our prophet. And from Him we obtain our hope of resurrection to eternal life, because He is our priest. From Him we derive our confidence that all events will be managed to deliver us into eternal life, because He is our king.

We know the truth because He has given it to us. We will be resurrected to eternal life because He has secured it for us. We are under the best possible rule because He is the supreme authority over us. Should that not fill us with gladness and joy and peace as we face a persecuting, hostile world, comprised of Satan and all of his helpers, as we fight through the warfare in this life to be delivered into the triumph of the next?

We know the truth. We have victory over death. We are under a perfect ruler, and therefore we are fully equipped to face the lies of the enemy and the persecution of the enemy and all of the conspiracies of the enemy against us, because our prophet and our priest and our king will triumph over them at every point.

His faithful witness will defeat their lies. His resurrection from the grave will defeat their persecutions of us when they do their worst and kill us. And His kingly rule will overcome their transnational conspiracy against us when He comes in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who know not God and those who obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and He casts Satan and the beast and the dragon and Babylon and all those who have the mark of the beast into the Lake of Fire forever, and manifests His supreme authority over them for all of eternity.

This should cause us to rejoice in the face of any persecution, to stand firm in the face of any lie, and to love not our lives to the death as we fight the good fight of faith, as faithful soldiers of Jesus Christ in advancing His kingdom in this world.

Well let us, then, be filled with rejoicing, confidence, assurance, and hope as we proceed through the description of what the enemy is going to do. And make no mistake, he will do great evil. But make no mistake, also, he shall go down to great defeat. Let that be our confidence as we face a world that hates us and is hostile to us.

And let us to that world proclaim this glorious Lord, without shame, without hesitation, without equivocation, without qualification, because He is a glorious Lord. To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Shall we pray together.

Father, we thank you for our glorious Lord Jesus. Thank you, Father, that we have a perfect source of truth. Thank you that we have a perfect deliverer from our sins and its consequence, death. Thank you that we have a perfect deliverer from evil men who would like to tyrannize us, and who themselves shall be brought under the heel of the Lord Jesus. We read in the Scriptures that God will crush Satan under our heel shortly. Father, we look forward to that day and that time.

Be pleased, Father, to have mercy on us and to bring us safely along and safely through. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on the faithful witness and the first begotten from the dead and the Prince of the kings of the earth. Father, we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.