

Introduction

In the town of St. George, Bermuda stands a spectacle that is popular among tourists though not for the usual reasons. Emerging out of the ground is the white brick exterior of a cathedral that was never completed. There are walls and openings for windows but there is no roof. The building was begun in 1870 with the thought of replacing another church building in town that had been damaged by a storm. But in the end, after having begun to build, the town just quit and turned their energies back to repairing the damage done to the old building. So what they started now stands as an abandoned curiosity for over 150 years. It goes by the nickname “unfinished church.” So the tourists come not for what was accomplished but to see what was abandoned. The building was initiated but never effectuated. It was commenced but not completed. We can only wonder what it could have been if it was finished.

As followers of Jesus Christ, as members of his church, it is important for us to remember that the church of Jesus is his building project. He is in process through time of constructing this building made up of his people. He vowed that he would build his church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. And it is especially important to remember this resolve when we as his church encounter resistance and hostility and tribulation in this world. There is hope and encouragement for Christians as we consider that what Christ has begun will not finally and fully be called the “unfinished church.” He will bring to completion what he has begun. We are reminded of this precious truth in Revelation 1:5-8.

[Read Text and Pray]

Twice in the space of 2 and a half verses we hear John enunciate the word, “Amen.” Literally, it means “truly” or “may it be so.” It is an affirming utterance which expresses one’s heart being knit with hope and joyful determination to something that has been said. John is enthusiastically affirming that Jesus will finish what he started. The main idea of this section is that Christ is glorified by the initiation and then the effectuation of his kingdom. Jesus Christ has begun a work in his church, and he will bring it to completion at the day of his return. No one can thwart him. Therefore, to Jesus Christ belong glory and dominion already in his saving work, but even more fully when he returns and his enemies will be finally subdued. These verses brim with hope and joy for Christ’s followers but signify horror for those who reject him.

I. A Word of Praise for Christ

A. John ascribes glory and dominion to Jesus. To ascribe glory to Christ is to proclaim his worth and majestic exquisiteness. It is to look at Christ and exclaim that he is worthy of honor and blessing and admiration. To ascribe dominion to Christ is to proclaim his sovereign rule. It is to delight that he possesses all authority in heaven and on earth, that he is messiah and king, and that he shall reign forever.

B. This word of praise is occasioned by the contemplation of several aspects of the great and wonderful work Jesus has done. It is what he has done with “us.” Who are these who are designated “us”? Well it includes John, of course, and the term also includes the ones to whom John is writing—those who make up the seven churches. John identifies himself as their brother. He is speaking of the church of Jesus in general, composed of all who believe in Christ. That is who “us” is. “Us” includes me and you if you are a believer in, a follower of, and a servant of Jesus Christ.

Christ has blessed those in this group in mind-boggling ways. John mentions three of them here. He loves us. He has freed us. And he has made us a royal priesthood. The foundation of what he has done is his love. Notice the tense of the word love. It is present. He LOVES us. He has freed us and he has made us, but presently, he loves us. The love of God is an everlasting love. It is from eternity past into eternity future, and therefore, the love of the Lord is a present and ongoing reality.

Within the heart of every human being is the desire to be loved. We want someone to desire us, someone who will delight in us and care for us, someone who will make us the apple of their eye, someone to whom we will be precious, who will never let us go. Most humans spend their lives looking for this kind of love in the arms of another human being. But there is no love as great, none that can be compared with the love of God.

O love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure—The saints' and angels' song.

If you are loved by Christ, you could not be loved any better than he loves. You need no other love. All other loves will fall short no matter how intense the feelings may be, the reality of God's love is the fountain of all other love that is true. And if you do not love him, you cannot really love another.

And here are two great evidences of the love of Jesus Christ. He has freed us from our sins by his blood and he has made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father. One of the most incredible realities that can be known to a human being is this one: being freed from sin. Sin is why God's wrath is coming. Sin has produced depraved minds whose thinking is futile and foolish. Living as a sinner is like living in a prison while trying to convince oneself it is paradise. Sorrow and pain and emptiness and heartache and destruction abound. Sin binds us in futile thinking and futile living and has us bound for condemnation. There is no greater freedom than to be set free from this enslavement.

And there was no greater payment that could ever be made than what Christ paid to set us free. Christ has freed his people from their sins BY HIS BLOOD. He shed his blood. He died. He was crucified. The wrath of God due sinners took his life from him that by his death we might live. The Israelites, were enslaved in Egypt under terrible and distressing bondage. God freed them, however, and the price was blood—the blood of the Passover lamb. The Israelites killed the lambs, placed the blood above the doorposts and were spared when the angel of death passed by and slew the firstborn of the Egyptians. And thus Pharaoh was compelled to let God's people go.

Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. And if you are in Christ, through faith, Christ has set you free from sin's condemnation and free from sin's power! The greatest reality that can be known to a human being is to know God, but we cannot know him truly while still in our sins. Sin is our greatest threat and enemy. To be free from sin is such an unspeakable blessing. Knowing and affirming this freedom induces praise and thanks and joy like nothing else! If you, a believer in Jesus Christ, are living in the doldrums, you are not being mindful of the love of Christ which he has shown you in the freedom that Christ has bought for you at the cost of his own life.

If you do not belong to Christ, the offer of freedom is for you. You can know the greatest blessing a human can know if you will turn from sin and trust in the blood of God's substitutionary lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, not only has he freed us from sin but he has made us a kingdom and priests to his God. Turn over please in your Bibles to Exodus 19. And here I have to show you something which I find amazing. When Israel was freed from Egypt after the shedding of the blood of the Passover lamb, the people entered the wilderness on their way to the promised land. As they were going they came to Mt Sinai where the Lord met them and gave them the law. But just before God gave them the law, he gave the people a promise. Now I want you to see in your Bibles the place where we find this promise. The Lord is speaking to Moses and giving him a word to carry to the Israelites. He wanted them to recall how he had freed them. Verse 4 says: "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself." Now, in verse 5, comes a conditional promise. It is conditional in that a demand is made on the part of the Israelites and they must meet the demand. And if they meet the demand, God will fulfill his word. So let's look at Exodus 19:5. "Now, therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel." The promise was conditional. It would be fulfilled IF the Israelites obeyed God's voice and kept the covenant. And if they did, God would keep the promise. But they did not, did they? The history of Israel is a history of a people addicted to covenant-breaking.

But now here in Revelation 1:5b-6, the promise to Israel is an accomplished fact. What God said he would do he now has done. Christ is the true Israel of God. He obeyed the voice of God and kept his covenant. And now in Christ, the church is loved. She IS God's treasured possession. She has been brought out from under the oppression of the kingdom of darkness to God himself. And he HAS MADE her a kingdom and priests to himself. She rules with Christ and she mediates God's presence in this world. This is an important truth about Christ's church. The conditional promises made to Israel are fulfilled toward the church. Here is evidence of Christ's love!

C. Brothers and sisters, John teaches us here that worship is essential to living with a joyful and victorious attitude. Here in the midst of exile, John ascribes glory and dominion to Christ with a hearty "Amen." And these churches, troubled as they were with temptation and tribulation and false teaching, should be able to join in with John in praise. And it is important that they do. It also important that we do the same. First, Christ is worthy, but second, our hearts are fortified through praise.

How do we discern God's love for us? It is not uncommon that we find ourselves in the middle of trouble, of temptation, of trial like John and the seven churches. Our circumstances are not the proof or disproof of Christ's love. The proof is that while we were still sinners Christ DIED for US. The proof is that we are his prized possession, his kingdom, his priests to live under his glorious rule and to reign with him and to come into the beauty of his presence. The proof of his love is what he has done and what he has yet promised to do. And all God's promises are "yes" and "Amen" in Christ.

And not only that, the fuel that we need to weather the storms of persecution and temptation and tribulation is to be full of wonder and worship for who Christ is and for all he has done. If you feel you are living in defeat, lift up your eyes to Jesus! Praise him! Worship him. Adore him! Glory in who he is and in what he has done for you! It sets the tone of victory and joy in your life.

II. A Word of Alarm for the Tribes

John turns from the fact that Christ has saved his people and made them a kingdom to the return of the king. "Behold, he is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all of the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen."

Here is a fearful and somber depiction of gloom and horror. When Jesus ascended to heaven, a cloud took him out of sight. The disciples were told that Jesus himself will come in the same way they had seen him leave. The difference between the ascension of Jesus and his return is that when he ascended, the onlookers were his disciples, but when he returns everyone will see him including his enemies. And when they see him, his enemies over all the earth will be filled with horror. The one they have resisted, the one they have rejected, the one who created the heavens and the earth and who calls them to account will appear before their very eyes. And they will wail. They will be engulfed with dread and sorrow. It will be the beginning of the effectuation of the kingdom of Christ. His enemies will be put down. Jesus will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. And John says, "Even so. Amen." John vigorously approves of this coming judgment, for it vindicates Christ by vindicating the hope and testimony of his people. It is not because he is bloodthirsty. It is because he delights in the righteousness of God.

Believers in the time before Christ returns may wonder why if we are God's precious possession, if he loves us as he has said, and if he has made us to be a kingdom and priests to him, why are things so hard. Why have circumstances not become kinder to us? Why are we oppressed? The answer is that the kingdom has been inaugurated but is not yet consummated. The kingdom is initiated but not yet effectuated. It has come, but it has not yet been fully exerted. The kingdom is currently being expanded one soul at a time. People are being delivered from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of Christ. These are all indicators of our King's full sovereignty, but the final and full expression of that sovereignty is future. And we look forward to it. We long for it and love the thought of it. We hope in it. It is the unshakeable basis of our confidence. Jesus is coming. For all to see. And to strike down the nations and rule them with an iron scepter. All who have not loved his appearing will flee as his kingship is brought to bear upon the nations. You do not want to be the enemy of Jesus on that day. You will either mourn over your sins before that day or you will mourn over your eternal destiny on that day.

III. A Word of Assurance for the Church

We are assured by who Christ is. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

Nothing can stay his hand. No one can keep him from accomplishing what he has promised!

Conclusion

Ultimately, there is no "unfinished church" when Jesus is the builder. And there is no lack of sovereignty when he is the king. He will build his church in the midst of attack not because he is weak but to display his strength. He will allow the nations to rage for a while, but not forever. What was inaugurated when Jesus came the first time will be effectuated when he comes the next. So keep your heads up and your eyes on Him.

Prayer

Benediction

Now may he who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us to be a kingdom, priests to his God and Father assure with the hope of his return, to whom be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.