

Revelation: The Triumph of the Lamb
Behold Your King
Revelation 1.4-8

Text:

Revelation 1:1-20 (ESV)

¹The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ²who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. ³Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

⁴John to the seven churches that are in Asia: 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, ⁵and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

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.

⁷Behold, 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.

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

⁹I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹saying, “**Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.**”

¹²Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

¹⁷When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “**Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. ¹⁹Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. ²⁰As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.**

Introduction:

In the early ‘90’s there was a craze centered around these crazy pictures that looked like a bunch of scribbled lines; but if you could get your eyes focused past the squiggly lines on something beyond and behind the lines, then a 3-D object would pop off the paper right before your eyes? Do you

recall that craze? How many of you were among the majority of people who could not get those stupid things to work for you?

Well, one commentator uses those “Magic Eye” pictures as a good parable describing the theme of the book of Revelation as Christians learn how to think about the world. He writes:

To see the pattern that counts, you have to focus beyond the surface, to see the shape of deep realities not accessible to the casual observer. Like everyone else, Christians spend much of every day with eyes and minds focused on the surface of things – details about deadlines, delays, dollars, dress, food, shelter, going and coming, work and recreation, politics and more. Attending to everyday issues is necessary and right, but our hearts long to see the big picture, the meaning that lies behind the details...¹

...especially when the details of life are built around pain and suffering, persecution and trials.

The Revelation shown to John unveils this deep pattern beneath the surface of human history. How appropriate that before everything else, John first sees the One who makes sense of history and holds the big picture in his hand.

Revelation 1:4-8 (ESV)

⁴ John to the seven churches that are in Asia: 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.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

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.

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

Before we walk through these verses as our text today, let me make one point of clarification here. When John says he is writing to the seven churches that are in Asia, he does not use the word *Asia* as we do to refer to the continent. The first century understanding would have been to western Asia Minor, or modern day Turkey, where some of these cities still exist today.

Now – notice that grace and peace comes flowing to the readers from.... There is a three-fold use of the word *from* in v.4. Grace and peace comes to the readers:

- *From* him who is and who was and who is to come;
- *From* the seven spirits who are before his throne;
- *From* Jesus Christ.

This is an obvious allusion to God as Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The order is changed from our usual theological flow of Father, Son and Spirit to emphasize the Son here. But we need not speed past the other two to get to the revelation about Jesus Christ.

¹ Johnson, *The Triumph of the Lamb*, pp.49-50.

First, John describes the Father as *the one who is and who was and who is to come*. God the Father is the eternally existent One. This description harkens back to Exodus 3:14-15 where God addresses himself to Moses as that I AM who I Am.

Exodus 3:14-15 (ESV)

¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

This three-fold expression of God as “the one who is and who was and who is to come” is unique to the book of Revelation:

- Revelation 4:8 (ESV)
⁸ And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”
- Revelation 11:17 (ESV)
¹⁷ saying, “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign.
- Revelation 16:5 (ESV)
⁵ And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, “Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments.

So as John begins to take hold of a vision that will enable the church of Jesus Christ to focus beyond the surface so as to bring a big picture into focus, he sees God as Triune. He sees a God who is in control, possesses all authority and is present with his people. Theologian John Frame, in his book, *The Doctrine of God*, says that the attributes of Lordship are control, authority and presence. The book of Revelation holds these as there theme.

Next, John describes the Holy Spirit as the seven-fold spirit before his throne. This may simply be an allusion to Isaiah 11.2 where Isaiah describes God the Messiah as a man upon whom the Holy Spirit rests and then he lists the seven-fold nature of the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah 11:2 (ESV)

² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

But I think it is more likely to see John borrowing his imagery from Zechariah chapter 4 (turn there) where the author saw a lampstand with seven bowls of oil. John seems to connecting the church (the lampstands, cf. 1:20) with the ministry of the HS.

Zechariah 4:1-7 (ESV)

¹ And the angel who talked with me came again and woke me, like a man who is awakened out of his sleep. ² And he said to me, “What do you see?” I said, “I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. ³ And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.” ⁴ And I said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” ⁵ Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.” ⁶ Then he said to me, “This is the

word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts. ⁷ Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’”

You can see the obvious similarities between Zechariah and what is about to be written concerning the seven churches, the seven gold lampstands and the part the HS plays in the writing to these seven churches. Look at Revelation 3:1

- Revelation 3:1 (ESV)
¹ “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. “I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.’”
- Revelation 4:5 (ESV)
⁵ From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God,
- Revelation 5:6 (ESV)
⁶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

John’s point is that God’s control, authority and presence – His Lordship is being carried out on earth through the powerful presence of the His Spirit. More to the point, God’s rule, God’s presence, God’s authority is being carried out on earth via his church who is carried along not by might nor by power but by the Spirit. Thus, each of the seven letters ends with the exhortation found in 2:7, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

But since this is the revelation about Jesus Christ, he comes last for emphasis. Listen to John description of Jesus:

Revelation 1:5-7 (ESV)

⁵ and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

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

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.

John gives three descriptive qualities of Jesus followed by a description of his work.

First he gives three descriptive qualities:

1. The Faithful witness – It is obvious that Christ’s credibility is proven by his earthly life and obedience – even to the point of death, which makes for a possible word-play for John. The word he uses for “witness” is also the word for martyr. The most obvious testimony Jesus can offer as a witness is his innocent death – his martyrdom. John could be alluding to the fact that Jesus is the first Christian martyr.

This reference to Jesus being the faithful witness could weigh heavily upon the readers from Smyrna who were undergoing persecution at the time of this writing. Look at 2:10

¹⁰ Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

And Jesus has the right to give that crown of life because of the next description offered to us by John...

2. The firstborn from the dead – Paul uses this phrase in Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15, 18 and it occurs in Hebrews 1:6. This description is always linked with authority, headship or rank. "Firstborn" does not mean first in time to accomplish something, but rather, first in kind to accomplish something so that he now is the ruler of that deed. This provides great encouragement to know that Jesus Christ is the "firstborn from the dead" in that He is the ruler of death. Notice how Jesus' authority over death is described in v.18.

Revelation 1:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

3. The ruler of kings on earth

With this three-fold description, John paints a powerful picture of Lordship – Jesus is in control. Jesus has authority. Jesus is present.

Next, he describes three kinds of works:

- To him who loves us
- To him who has freed us from our sins by his blood
- To him who made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father

But he describes them in the form of a doxology – He bursts out into praise as he begins to see all that is coming in his vision. To this kind of Jesus just described belongs all the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

This is a Jesus who loves us – presently! Compare that present tense love with the past tense verb – He has freed us from our sin at the cost of his blood! This is a Jesus who has fulfilled his New Covenant promises by purchasing a people and making them a kingdom of priests who serve God night and day. The very same promise he had made with the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai (cf. Exod. 19:6), he has now fulfilled in the people of God represented by these seven Gentile churches. The believers in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyratira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea are now a kingdom of priests to God at the cost of his Son's blood.

These are the kinds of things we celebrate in the Lord's Table this morning.

We celebrate that it is to Jesus Christ alone who is to receive all the glory and dominion forever and ever because he has made us a kingdom of priests, setting us free from our sin and demonstrating that he loves us – all at the cost of his blood. He is with us in power and great glory through the presence and power of His Spirit.

Revelation 7:13-17 (ESV)

¹³ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" ¹⁴ I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and

serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Revelation 5:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ 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.”