

REVELATION

Every Knee Shall Bow

Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. - Rev. 22:7

Revelation 1:4-8 Greetings To The Church

Introduction

A. Review

Verse 4

A. Seven churches in Asia:

1. Why only these seven? (Revelation 1:11; 2-3)
2. Numerology and the Bible and what we can learn. Some examples to ponder.
3. Seven is the number of fullness, completeness and totality. So these seven churches represent the church in all its need. They also receive the full counsel of Jesus to them.

B. Grace and Peace:

1. Grace defined: our definition vs. His! A vital lesson we need to help us grow in faith and in our walk with Him.
2. Grace precedes peace for it is one of its fruits.

C. Seven Spirits who are before the throne:

1. The fullness of the work of the Holy Spirit, repeated in Rev. 3-5. We see the numeric symbolism used and referenced in (Isa. 11:2) and compliments its use to the seven lamp stands which are the seven churches.
2. This imagery is used again in Rev. 4:5 to show us the Holy Spirit.

Verse 5

A. With verse 4 we see this grace and peace offered from the Triune God: Father, Holy Spirit and Son. Jesus is listed last for He is the subject of this unveiling.

B. Faithful witness: (See also Rev. 3:14)

1. Jesus came to a world sitting in darkness to reveal the heart of God and His love, and to that He was faithful in every way. All He did, all He said, and in every action and reaction He took He properly presented God to man (Heb. 1:3). Want to know God? Look at Jesus (Jn. 1:18; 14:9; 18:37). Jesus finished His work (Jn. 17:4).
2. Now we are called to be those faithful witnesses to our generation (Lk. 24:48). Not that we are perfect, but it is our goal to be able to say "Follow me as I follow Christ!" So (Acts. 1:8) (2Co. 5:18-20).

C. Firstborn from the dead:

1. (Prototokos) means first in priority, pre-eminent in importance. By far it was Jesus' resurrection that was the most valuable for without His resurrection, we cannot rise (1Co. 15:11-20, Col. 1:18, Heb. 1:6).

D. Jesus was also the first to receive a glorified body (1Co. 15:11-20)

E. Ruler over the kings of the earth:

1. True in the sense of His sovereignty today as Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4) slowly learned. As Jesus returns every knee shall bow before His throne (Heb. 2:8, Zec. 14:9, Ps. 72:11, Isa. 9:6-7).

- F. To Him who loved us:
 1. Notice this grace of love was uncaused by us (Isa. 53:6). I was loved by God the same as His enemy and now as His child. This un-altering love is a foundational truth that should establish and solidify our faith at all times.
 2. Often we are told of God's degree of love followed by the actions that came from it...as in Jn. 3:16 with Jn. 3:14-15 or here as His love drove Him to save us, wash us in His own blood.
- G. And washed us from our sins in His own blood:
 1. From the fall of Adam and Eve and the animal skins provided by God to cover their nakedness and shame...to the sacrifices of the Old Testament and finally Jesus "Lamb of God", we have been told of the cleansing power of the blood. (Isa. 1:18)...
 2. How powerful? (1Jn. 1:9) ...don't miss the word "all"! (1Pe. 1:18-19)

Verse 6

- A. The role of the priest was two-fold: appearing before God for the people and then before the people for God. So Jesus our high priest appeared before God for us, dying in our place and now appeals to us for God's love and forgiveness.
- B. So we are called to be His priests now, and one day in His kingdom rule and reign with Him as kings and priests (1Pe. 2:9-10).

Verse 7-8

- A. Behold He is coming: The subject of this book!
- B. In the clouds: (Acts 1:9-11)
 1. The rapture vs. His second coming: private and public view (1Th. 4:13-15, 1Co. 15:52, Mt. 24:29-30).
- C. Even they who pierced Him and all the tribes of the earth will mourn...:
 1. Both the nation of Israel (Zec. 12:10-12; 13:6) and all men (Mt. 24:30). Some will rejoice (Isa. 25:9) but most will mourn, seeing they have rejected the Lord.
 2. Those raptured by the millions will return with Jesus at His second coming (Jude 1:14, Col. 3:4).
- D. I Am:
 1. A trademark in the book of John as Jesus is set forth as God come in the flesh. So (Jn. 8:24) (Jn. 8:58)(Jn. 18:6) and by comparison to the words the Father used with Moses (Ex. 3:6,14). Jesus is God!
- E. Alpha and Omega:
 1. First and the last (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12-13). The Father is referred to by this same title in (Rev. 21:6) for Jesus is God!
- F. Who is, Who was and Who is to come:
 1. Here spoken of Jesus, in (Rev. 1:4) it was a reference to the Father...Jesus is God indeed!
- G. Almighty:
 1. The Omnipotent One who has the rule over all!!!
- H. Next week: Rev. 1:9-20 Face to face with Jesus Christ

All right. Let's open our Bibles this evening to Revelation 1:4. This is our second week of our introduction to this book. Next week we will get to the first vision of the many that John gets. If you're looking for notes from last week or any week that you might have missed, they're all in the book store on file; so you can always drop by there and pick one up. Or, if you go to our "Watch Live" page, there's a note section that you can click, and you can download whatever ones you may have missed. So I think that we have them available to you. I think they'll be helpful in your personal studies.

Last week we began with the first three verses. We're only going to look through verse 8 tonight, as John greets the churches to whom he is writing; has a lot to say about why he is writing and what he's going to be saying. And then, next week, we will come to this first vision of John's - of how Jesus looks today. This is the vision of the Lord that you haven't really found anywhere else but here.

So last week, as we started our look at this final book of the Bible, we told you that this book of Revelation was God's final word to man. This will sum up everything He has promised, everything He has said, every prophecy that has been spoken. It'll leave Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords, and every eye will see Him. His glory will be acknowledged by everyone.

We told you last week that John the apostle was the last living apostle, certainly. He was in his 90's. It was near the end of the 1st century when Domitian, the emperor, turned against the church in a big way. John was arrested in Ephesus - pastoring the church - sent 32 miles off the coast of Ephesus for his faith. And it was there, isolated, that the Lord appeared to John, gave him all of the visions and fulfillment that we are studying and will study, probably, for most of the year.

We are told in the first three verses, last week, that God gave this to us so that we might know Him better. Many people approach this book wondering if they're going to get any sense out of it at all. I don't think you'll have any problem. It certainly, to me, is not the hardest book to study in the Bible, doctrinally, at all. There are some tougher books. But we'll tackle this one. But it is God's plan, and it is God's purpose in giving us this book that He could reveal to us who He is. It's no

different than the other sixty-five books of the Bible. The Lord wants you to know Him well. That's His purpose. If God didn't want you to know Him, you wouldn't know Him at all. He's a revealing God. That's what He wants to be known. That's why He came to save.

So, as such, we need to understand the book. And prayerfully and with study - and we'll give you the notes and the cross references so that you can study on your own - hopefully you will come away from this book, if the Lord tarries, with a much greater love for the Lord and much better understanding of His grace and what was coming next.

We told you last week of some of the models that people use to teach this book and how they are really way off base, most of them, because they reveal a theological position that isn't very biblical. But we see this book as prophetic, and it is really the only view that can be adopted in line with God's will and His plans for the future because He wants to tell us what is coming at the end.

The word "revelation," as we mentioned last week, means to unveil. That's the whole purpose, anyway. God wants to make Himself known. He wants you to come to know Him. And this revelation is all about Jesus, and it concerns us knowing who He is. And, as a result, we are told that when this beginning work of God begins to roll, I should say when this takes place, in short order it'll come to the end.

So we read last week, before we finished, that an angel of the Lord was sent to signify (or we said sign-ify) to John that the word of God and the testimony of Jesus was what John was to record. And we took you over to verse 19, which I will refer you to again because it is the outline for this book. John is told to write down the things which he has seen (which really stop there at verse 19) and then the things which are (which is the Church Age, which will cover chapters 2 and 3) and then the things which will take place after those things (and that really begins in chapter 4). So the book kind of outlines itself. We ended with verse 3 last week because there's this unique promise of God that studying this book and putting your mind to just learn it and to read it and then to hear it and then to keep it, everything that's written therein, God promises to bring great blessing upon your life. And so I fully suspect that if you're here every week with your Bibles out and your notepads and, "Lord, speak to me," God's going to honor that word to you. He's going to bless you for making the effort to get to know Him better.

Well tonight we're going to, like I said, look at verses 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8, which are still not any vision; it is just John's introduction. Someone said to me last week, "You're not movin' along too fast." Well, we'll get there. I just don't want you to miss out on anything in between.

But here's what John writes, verse 4, "John, to the seven churches which 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, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,' says the Lord, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.' "

So the revelation is all about Jesus. And tonight his greeting to the church, before he shares his first vision, and really from verse 9 through verse 20, which we are going to look at next week, is really the vision, like I said, of Jesus in all of His glory. It's important that you know those verses - from 9 through verse 20 - because the description that John writes about what he saw is the very same description that Jesus is going to use in Revelation 2 and 3 in the seven letters that He writes to the seven churches; and He uses a portion of the description about Himself that fits the message. So they kind of line up, right? It's the Lord speaking, and He wants them to know that He knows exactly what is going on with them, and He identifies Himself by this portion of the description that John gives to us. So we're going to go over that next week.

Notice that we read the word "John" in verse 4, and you want to say, "John who?" But you should know that at least, from a historical standpoint, John - just his first name without distinction is real typical John. He really does kind of stand away from any kind of glory or honor, and the fact that he is the author here and just is able to use his name "John" would tell you that he's one of the more famous guys in the church in Asia Minor in the 1st century. He was the last surviving apostle. Everyone would have just known him as "John," could have called him old John or I don't know, but "John" was good enough. They knew him.

The letter is sent, notice verse 4, "to the seven churches which are in Asia." These seven churches are addressed by name in verse 11. So if you want to know who are these seven churches, you just read ahead to verse 11, and you'll find them named there. And Jesus writes to them a personal letter that comprises chapters 2 and 3 - to those same seven churches. Now the question obviously becomes - why just these seven? There were certainly many more churches in Asia Minor at the end of the 1st century than these. Paul had established - in Asia Minor - several churches himself. The Corinthian church didn't show up here. The Galatian church isn't mentioned. The Philippian church doesn't make an appearance or the Colossian church even though, when he wrote to the Colossian church, he did mention the nearby Laodicean church, which is mentioned in chapter 4:13 of Colossians.

The use of numbers to symbolize more than what is just a count is often found in the Scriptures, none more so than in this book. I mentioned to you last week that we don't guess at what things mean; we let the Scriptures tell us themselves. And if we can't find an answer in the Bible, we just leave it alone. I would rather say, "I don't know" than, "Here's what I think" because that's worth about nothing to you, what I think. The danger obviously is properly applying numerology, and the folks that use numerology a lot tend to use it very randomly, sometimes teaching very fanciful kinds of ideas, or they limit them simply to a count and won't allow them to be symbolic at all. But the key, I think, in letting the Bible define your symbolism is one of the helpful tools that you're going to find in studying this book. So whether it's numerology or whether it's symbols, whether it's typology, just determining whether God intends for it to be symbolic or typical is oftentimes established by how it's used in a repetitive way throughout the Scriptures. What does God say over and over again in using them? And is it used, more often than not, symbolically or to convey something beyond just the number or just the name?

I'll give you a couple of examples. They're in your notes as well. The number two, when it is used symbolically in the Scriptures, oftentimes speaks about witness. You can, for example, go to chapter 11 of this book, and we will run into two witnesses that God will use to bear witness to the world as He is bringing His judgment. There are two lampstands and two olive trees found there in chapter 11 as well. The Law often says that the truth should be established by two witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15). When there are no witnesses available, the Lord calls on heaven and earth to be a witness. But, again, there are those two that are mentioned. Moses, in Deuteronomy chapter 31:28, calls for two again - the heaven and the earth - to be witnesses against the people if they will not respond to the

Word of God. In the New Testament, it is the Law and the Prophets that are witnesses against those who are rejecting the Lord. And so it is used constantly in that way, and so you would be comfortable to say in the Bible, very often, the number two, when it is used in those contexts, speaks often of being a witness or bearing witness. Is that always true? No. Sometimes it just says there're two people. All right? That's probably it. Just stop at two. But when it is used beyond that, you can have some credibility and some footing by just finding the Scriptures yourself.

The number three in the Scriptures speaks of life, resurrection. Six days of creation; on each day, God pronounced it was good. Except for day two. So He mentions it twice on day three in *Genesis 1*, the day of double blessing, so to speak. It's very unusual. It stands out. The third day was also when life first appeared in creation. God said twice, "This is good." Jesus rose on the third day as will the two witnesses in *Revelation 11*; they will rise on the third day. And so those are the kinds of things you want to look for if you're going to be comfortable letting a word or a number substantiate something other than just a numerical value.

The number four usually represents the world. There are four angels that are holding back the four winds from the four corners of the earth (*Revelation 7:1*).

The number five usually speaks about the provision of God's grace. The waters on the earth, five months before they began to recede (*Genesis 7:24*). Benjamin, you might remember, got five times the serving from his brethren and so on (*Genesis 43:34*).

And so you can begin to just, when the Lord uses them consciously and repetitively, draw some conclusions. The number eight, for example, is the number of new beginnings. The number forty is usually the number of judgment. And then we get this number seven, and it's used a lot. In fact, the number seven in the Scriptures is almost always used for completeness or entirety or totality, if you will. There're seven days in a week; seven days of creation although, on the seventh day, the LORD rested; seven primary colors in the rainbow; seven notes on a scale - that all signify a completeness.

So we get to these seven churches, and all of these churches - all seven of them - existed in the 1st century in a pretty small area. And yet we conclude, because of the number and the messages, that the number seven churches refers to, to us,

this is all that the Lord wants to say to the church. You're the church. You're on the church. This is what God's word to the church is during the Church Age. Nothing needs to be added to it. This is how He sees the church. Some of them were doing well, some of them not so well. Some of them were in different generations, doing well. Others ceased to exist. But these seven letters covered all that God wants to say. There is a complete message from the Lord to the church, to us, to a church in every generation. Churches differ from country to country, denomination to denomination. Some depart from the faith. Others have compromised the faith. Some churches are absolutely dead, though they have a name that still lives. Others are remaining close to God's Word. Some are known for their architecture, not their Scriptures. Some are known for their choirs, not the Word of God. Some are just known for their faith. But God's Word to all of them is found in these seven addresses that completely cover what God wants to say. And that's important because the Lord could have written forty more chapters, and we'd have had to read them all. But this is able to take and apply. It's the number of completeness.

It is thought by many - and I totally agree, and I'll try to show you as we go - that these seven churches, in order as they are presented to us, also provide for us a broad panorama of church history - starting with the 1st century church, the Ephesus church, going all the way to the end, to the Laodicean church - and that you can literally look through history at periods, blocks of time, where the church is represented by that second letter or by that third letter. It doesn't mean that the letters don't apply to all of us in every generation. But in a prophetic sense, you almost see the Lord painting this huge panorama of this is how the church history is going to travel so that the Laodicean church is the condition of the church, if you will, when the Lord returns for His people. And we'll try to show you that as we go through. But, like I said, all of these churches existed at one time, and it is the primary application of the letters we're going to read from Jesus have to be applied individually because churches are people, and they're God's people.

We're going to see many sevens in this book. Some of them are literal; many of them are not. And I think we can show you when they're symbolic in application. To point them out, there are seven Spirits (we just read that - verse 4; we're going to read it in verse 20), seven stars, seven golden candlesticks, seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven judgments. In John's gospel, I think we mentioned to you, John builds his whole case for believing in Christ around the seven "I am" quotations of Jesus. "*Ego eimi*." (I learned that from your wife, I

think, taught me how to say that correctly. Gerard's wife can speak Greek. I messed it up, and she corrected me. "*Ego eimi.*") Seven declarations. "I am." It is the same word that the Lord used when He met with Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:13-14). "Who shall I say sent me?" And He'll say, "Tell them 'I AM WHO I AM' sent you." God's declaration of who He is.

So, be careful when you press numbers to make them symbolic when they're not supposed to be. But if you're going to see them that way, be sure you have a biblical foundation to be able to make that assumption because God has done that time and time again. And that's where I think careful study comes through.

So it is John's writing to the seven churches, the complete message to the church from Jesus. "Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven" (there's that number again) "Spirits who are before His throne." It's interesting to me that the book of judgment and final upheaval begins with a word of blessing from God to His servants. "Grace to you" can certainly not be understood apart from a relationship with God through His Son. But since this is the unveiling of His glory, you ought to come away from this book seeing clearly the grace of God or understanding God's grace. And I think there's something to be said for being able to embrace what that means to you. Because the word itself, "grace," means unmerited favor. But to the world, grace usually either means someone that can stand on their toes without falling over or something that you say real quickly before you eat. But that's not biblical grace. Biblical grace is God's blessings given to man, totally undeserved, that is brought to you or presented to you as a result of God's great love for you. There really is nothing in you that would promote His grace or even His attention. He didn't say, "Oh, ho, these are lovely people, I think I'll embrace them." No. We were sinners and enemies of God, but God, in His grace, decided to reach out to us.

So John begins this address from the Lord, this revelation from God about His Son, by wishing grace to them. For God to love us must be grace. Like I said, nothing can be found in you or me except rebellious kind of sinners with no inherent behavior that would warrant His love. But by His grace, He loves me, and He desires for us to be drawn back to Him by His Son. If you've never read Pastor Chuck Smith's book "Grace Changes Everything," I'd encourage you to find it and read it. It'll change the way you look at life. I think it's one of the best books on grace that I have ever read. It is hard for us to receive grace gracefully, and the reason is we somehow have this concept in our minds that goodness and blessing

ought to be earned. We learned it as kids. You get good grades in school, you clean your room, you get an allowance. Everything's a reward system. Until you get to the Lord. And then, if you realize what you owe, you don't want a reward system at all. You don't want God to give you what you deserve. In fact, I bet none of you would stand before the Lord tonight and say, "Lord, just give me what I deserve." You don't want that. God will give you what you don't deserve, what you haven't earned. And it is an amazing concept that is harder to grasp than to mentally, I think, grab a hold of. Judgment is far easier because most of us, if we're honest, feel like we deserve it anyway. So, "Judgment's okay. I deserve it. I deserve more than that." Grace is hard. It's the other side of the coin. Right? Grace is harder to fathom because it's not expected. I don't expect God to give us that much, but yet He loves me, and if you know that to be so, it'll liberate your walk. It'll change the way you go about. Because there're a lot of Christians, to this day, that relate to God based on a merit system, and so their spiritual lives are on or off depending how good they've been. If they've been prayerful and in church and not sinning too much, "Oh, I expect God to bless me. I've been faithful. Even tithed more than normal. Come on, Lord, pour it out on me.....a blessing!" And if I've been a real idiot, like we are usually, we don't expect anything from God. "Yeah, He probably saw that thing the other day. I'm sorry. Okay. No dessert for me this week." And we relate to the Lord like that, which is very limiting. We expect blessings when we've done well; we expect little when we've done poorly. And my prayers and my hopes kind of depend upon my recent performance. It's almost like God is Santa Claus, checking His list twice. But grace says just the opposite. God knows you completely and loves you anyway. Anyway. If we knew you well, we might not. I suspect you feel like that about you.

But God loves us in knowing all about us, which is just amazing. He knows you at your worst and loves you all the same. My weak works I can surrender to the Lord because I know that He loves me no matter what; which means if I understand grace, it brings out the best in me. I want to do well. Not because He owes me something but because I feel like I owe Him everything. And grace causes me to behave like that. It's not a barter system anymore. Everything I get, God has given me freely. It's not about merit to me any longer. It's about His grace. And so, as an expression of His love, He gives me grace. As an expression of my love, I come to serve Him - not in a hope for gain but just as a response to His goodness towards me. I used to believe that salvation was based on works, you know, "You don't smoke, you don't chew, you don't go with those that do." That kind of thing.

But it's all about His grace. Jesus died for my sins, and though I don't deserve that, by believing in Him, I'm given life.

So John's wish for the church - God's wish for the church - is that you learn to live with God's grace and show that grace to one another. God's grace. And notice that always in these blessings that start at the beginning of most letters, the word "peace" will always follow because peace with God is a gift of His grace. You've been saved. You and God are not at war anymore. That which had separated you from God - your sin - has been paid for and done away with. The door is open. You can come boldly into His throne room with your prayers (Hebrews 4:16). You're welcome there. You're going to be welcomed when you get there. It is all about the peace with God that Jesus has bought. And then when you get to know the Lord and you begin to walk in that peace with God, then the Bible says you have the peace of God. You begin to have the same outlook that the Lord has. "Oh, He can handle this. I don't need to worry about this. He's far more able than I'm giving Him credit for."

So, here in verse 4 and in verse 5, this grace and peace are offered to us from the Father, from the Holy Spirit, and finally from the Son, Jesus Christ, because there's one God, three Persons. Notice grace and peace "from Him who is and who was and who is to come." Those are three tenses of the word "to be," and, at least from a biblical standpoint and from a Greek standpoint, there is no greater way to communicate the eternal existence of God. He always was, He always is or He is, and He always will be. That'll blow you away. That'll just get you to go, "Oh, okay. I don't get it, but that's phenomenal!" I've tried to figure out "always was." Have you ever tried to think that through? It'll just give you a headache. I believe it because God says so, but I don't get it. The vanishing point is the word for eternity. Right? For eternal or everlasting.

So when the Lord spoke to Moses to free those in Egypt, He gave him the word Jehovah (Exodus 6:3), and the word Jehovah is really God becoming what we need Him to become. "I AM WHO I AM," He said. So God is eternal. He's beyond our comprehension. This "was and is and will be" description is used four times in this book just to try to describe to us who God is. Remember, it's the revelation of Jesus Christ. God wants you to know Him for who He is. God had no beginning. God has no end. It'll just blow your mind. And the Father is God, the Spirit is God, Jesus Christ is God. And so it is beyond me. I love the fact that I don't get it because if you served a God that you understood perfectly, not much of a God. But

He's far beyond my understanding, and I stand in awe of that. I don't get it, I don't get it. I tried layin' in bed thinkin' about always.....ah, I don't get it. And even the descriptions people have used to try to explain it to me just fall way short.

So, "grace and peace from the seven Spirits who are before His throne." Remember we just said the number seven is the number for completeness when it is used that way. Here are the references to the Person and the work of the Holy Spirit. You will find Him described in the same manner in chapter 3, in chapter 4, and in chapter 5 as well. We will later see the complete judgment of God in the seven seals, the seven trumpets, the seven bowls, the seven plagues. If you go to the Old Testament to the tabernacle, and when Noah is told to build it (Exodus 25:8-9), he is told that this would be a type of heaven; it would be a living picture, an earthly picture of what heaven was like, a blueprint, if you will. When you enter the holy place, on your left there would be a candlestick with seven pots filled with oil - symbolic of the light that the Holy Spirit brought into a very dark place. In chapter 4 of this book, verse 5, we will read about the seven lamps of fire as being the seven Spirits of God. If you go to Isaiah 11:2, you will read about "the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might," and all. There'll be the seven explanations, if you will, of the work of God's Spirit, attributes that He is given. So, we will read of the seven lampstands in a minute, which are the seven churches; and they will be represented by seven stars, which are the "*aggelos*." "*Aggelos*" is a word for messenger, sometimes translated angel. But it is a writing to the spiritual leaders of these seven churches, which is to whom these letters that we get in chapter 2 are addressed. So, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches," and, like I said, these seven churches all have that reference of God's Spirit.

Verse 5 says, "and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him" (to Jesus) "who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood." Jesus is listed last here - the Father, the Spirit and then the Son - because Jesus is the One who's in focus here. And notice He is given three attributes in verse 5 that John wants us to think about that describe His role both as a Prophet and as a Priest and as a King. As a Prophet, He was a faithful witness. As the Priest, He was the firstborn from the dead. As the King, He was the ruler, the "*archon*," over the kings of the earth. He was the King over the kings of the earth.

So look in verse 5 there, and "from Jesus Christ the faithful witness." Jesus came as a Prophet. Into the world of darkness, Jesus came to reveal to you and me the Father and His love. He was a faithful witness, which means He showed you, faithfully, the heart of God. How faithful was Jesus? In everything He said, in everything He did, in the manner in which He did them, the way that He responded, the way that He reacted, He is a perfect portrait of the Father. In Hebrews 1:3 we will read the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. And so He purified us from our sins, then He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. But Paul, describing Him in Hebrews 1, said He is the exact presentation or manifestation of the will and to the heart of God. If you ever want to know what God's like, hang around Jesus. If you want to know how God's heart is, go read the gospels, and watch how Jesus reacts and what He says and what He might say in those situations. John will record Jesus saying, in chapter 1:18, "No man has seen God at any time. But God, the only and true, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known." He said to Philip, in John 14:9, "Philip, have you been this long with us and yet you say, 'Show me the Father'? Philip, if you've seen Me, you've seen the Father." He was a faithful witness. When Pilate said to Jesus (John 18:37), at His trial, "Are You a king then?" Jesus said, 'I am a king. For this reason I was born, to come into the world to testify to the truth, and everyone on this side of the truth would listen to Me.'" He was a faithful witness. So much so that when He was ready to die, in that prayer in John 17 down at the Kidron Brook, Jesus, in verse 4, said, "Father, I have brought You glory on the earth. I have completed the work that You sent Me to do." Which was what? To reveal the heart, the nature, the method of salvation and the love of God to man. So, this letter comes from Jesus, who is the faithful witness, the One that we serve.

Look, today you and I are called to be followers of Jesus and faithful witnesses for Him. In Luke 24:48, at that meeting on Easter evening, Jesus said to the disciples, "You are witnesses of these things. I'm going to send you out." And in Acts 1:8, "You're going to be witnesses for Me starting here in Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria, to the uttermost parts of the earth. You're going to be My faithful witnesses." Look, the world should see Jesus in us. That's who He would want us to be. I know it's presumptuous, and it's an admirable goal, to be able to say with Paul, "Follow me as I follow Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1) or to be able to say, "If you've seen me, you've seen Jesus." Or probably more exact, "If you've seen me, you wish you'd seen Jesus." But Jesus was a faithful witness. The word "witness" is the word for martyr, but it is usually not used in terms of someone physically dying; it

is used in terms of being the person who steps out of the way and isn't an influence - he represents somebody else. So there's going to be great profit in us studying the life and the words and the daily walk with Jesus. He never got rattled. He was good at praying. He was always up praying. He never seemed to worry or panic. He was always about walking in God's love and reaching out. He's phenomenal. When the disciples tried to stop moms from bringing their kids to Jesus because they thought, "Well, you're buggin' the Lord," He rebuked the apostles and said, "No, no, no, of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:13). When Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37, Luke 19:41) because He knew what was coming because they had written Him off, that's God's heart breaking. He wanted to save. He knew the destruction that would follow those who had set Him aside. And so today I'm sure God's heart breaks over those who walk away. So that's us. We're supposed to be those examples, right? In fact, Paul said to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 that we are now reconciled to the Lord who has given to us a ministry, a service, a calling of reconciliation to go out and to, in the name of the Lord, reconcile the world to Him through Christ; inviting people to come to the Lord through His Son. We're those faithful witnesses. And I'll tell you what. The world needs to hear that from us today, that God will give life to those who turn to Him. I want to have the heart of God when I see the lost. I want to love as He loves. But this book is going to repeat time and again these words: Jesus was faithful. Chapter 3:14, in one of the letters, you will read, "He who is Faithful and True has sent to you these things." So here's grace and peace from Jesus, the Faithful Witness. He's the Prophet.

Second of all, He was "the firstborn from the dead." The word "*prototokos*" is a Greek word that means prototype, in line with..... it is literally the first of many. It is a Greek word that speaks about preeminence, not in terms of number. He wasn't the firstborn. But in terms of importance or priority, He's the preeminent One, right? Which is what this word "*prototokos*" means. In other words, without Jesus rising from the dead, you're not going to rise from the dead because His resurrection is the important one. Without Him, none of us rises. Read 1 Corinthians 15. Or read Colossians 1:18, "He's the head of the body, He's the beginning, and the firstborn from the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy." That's what Paul said to the Colossians. Hebrews 1:6, "When God brought His firstborn into the world, He said: 'Let all the angels of God worship Him.'" But it's this same word. He's preeminent. He's the first one, by the way, to get a glorified body. He's the Lord. Firstborn. He was the Priest, right? The One that interceded for us.

And notice He's "the ruler over the kings of the earth." This is true now in the sense of God being in charge of the affairs of men. You might remember reading in the book of Daniel as Nebuchadnezzar had to learn the hard way that the Lord rules in the kingdom of men. It took him a long time to come to the right conclusion about God. One day soon Jesus will come back physically and bodily to rule and reign upon the earth. Paul said, in Hebrews 2, you don't yet see everything under His feet, but there's coming a time when you'll see that. This is the end, right? This is the revelation. This is a time when the Lord will show Himself. In Romans 14:11, it says, "every knee will bow, every tongue will confess." And then will all of those verses which speak of His rule be fulfilled, everything you read in the Old Testament prophets about the Lord coming to rule and to reign that you don't see as yet. There's a verse in Zechariah 14:9 that says, "The LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be - 'The LORD is one,' and His name one" (the only name). Well that's not true today, but it will be. He's coming to rule and to reign and to be the Lord. We read in Psalm 72:11 the words, "Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him." Isaiah wrote in chapter 9:6-7 about the Child that was born, the Son that was given, that the government would be upon His shoulder and that He would reign. Of His kingdom there would be no end. That's coming.

So, grace to you and peace from that Jesus who faithfully showed us who God was. He was the One who was preeminent in His death and resurrection, the One who is coming to reign over the earth. And here's the final description of Him in this verse. He is the One "who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood." This grace of love was entirely uncaused by us. He just loved us. We hadn't loved Him yet. He just loved us. "We like sheep went astray; every one, to His own way; the LORD has laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). By the way, this word "loved" here is, in Greek, in the present participle which literally means He is loving you right now. It literally means He loves you now. Not He loved you sometime back. He loves you now. It is an act of the past that has future implications. So if you ever have the devil come tell you that the Lord doesn't love you today, you just go back and help him to redefine this word. "Hey, devil, come here. See this word 'love'? It's in the present participle. He loves me now. He loves me now."

And not only does He love me now, He loves me to a great degree. "God so loved the world," He tells us (John 3:16). His love was to such a degree that He was willing to give His life. He loved me as His child. Many, I think, say they are in

love, and we use that word a lot. And English isn't too good with language. You know, we love our wife, and we love hot dogs. You know, they're the same. It's the same word. It can't be the same word, but it is. We'll see kids get married, and, "Oh, we just love each other," and they live in lalaland for about two or three months and then Mr. and Mrs. Perfect turn out not to be perfect at all. Yet God's love doesn't deviate. God's love doesn't change. God's love is consistent. God's love for you is unconditional. It was Shakespeare who said, quite rightly, "Love is not love if it alters when it alteration finds." God doesn't change. The One who loved us loved us so much, so deeply, so eternally, that He made the decision to come and shed His blood so that we could have our sins washed away. The word "washed" is (here we go Greek again) aorist tense. The aorist tense in the Greek - we don't really have it in English - means that there was something that happened in the past that continues to affect the future. And the word "loved" is in the present. So what you have is the present God loves me; in the past and in the future, He will continue to wash me from my sins. I'm covered coming and going. That's really what the word says. So, glory to God for His love. And God gives us a deliverance.

When Adam and Eve were created, they were given lots of liberty. At least if you read through the Genesis account, they really were only restricted from one tree with a pretty severe penalty. "Eat thereof; the day you eat, you die" (Genesis 2:16-17). "You can have anything else, do anything you want. Just stay away from this." And where do they go? Right there. We always have that drive, don't we? Death penalty attached to disobedience. When they sinned, and it was found out, God provided the skins of animals to cover their nakedness. It is the first hint of blood shed sacrifice for the covering of sin. It ultimately led to Jesus being the Lamb of God which, by the way, His title "Lamb of God" is found twenty-eight different times just in this book. It is the reference, again, to being saved by His blood. "Come now, and let us reason together. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). How effective is Jesus' blood on your sins? John will write in 1 John 1:9 (he wrote it about the same time as this book), "If you confess your sins, He is faithful and just to forgive you your sins and to cleanse you from" (A-L-L) "all unrighteousness." Can He forgive me for everything? Yeah, that's what the word ALL means. Sometimes we just need to be able to read. ALL unrighteousness. I can be made free from the power, from the penalty, even the eternal consequences of sin by the blood of the Lamb.

Verse 6, "And has made us"and literally this word reads in Greek, the verse "He has made us *a kingdom* of priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." The priest in the Old Testament had two jobs. His one job was to go before the LORD and represent the people - intercede for them, pray for them, ask God for mercy for them, direction. And then he was to turn away from the LORD and represent God to the people. So in the Old Testament, when the priest would go before the LORD, he would wear a breastplate. It had twelve stones in it that represented the twelve tribes of Israel. It hung around his neck, and the breastplate covered his heart. And he had to go before the LORD to, like I said, seek God and the love of God for His people. But then he had to turn around, and he had to represent the LORD as a go-between. So he would go to the people and demand of them, "Listen to the LORD. Follow His ways. Don't do this, do that." So he would go out, and he would come in; he would do that as well. So today we are to go out and represent the Lord, share His love, and then we're to go before the Lord and lift up the people. "God, speak to them. God, help them. God, help us." To Him be the glory and the honor and dominion. This is exactly what this book is about - the honor that the Lord is going to receive.

Well, then John ends this greeting by saying, in verse 7, "Behold, He is coming." The main thrust of this book is Jesus is coming. He's coming to rule, He's coming to reign, to establish His throne forever. And how He proceeds and what accompanies His coming and follows after is the subject of these prophetic visions of John. Now, I think that God's desire for the church is always to have been living in anticipation of His coming. You might remember John the Baptist was arrested while Jesus was still here, and he fully expected the Lord to come and deliver him. In fact, he sent some disciples to Him with a question (Matthew 11:2-3), "Are You the One that we should be waiting for, or is there somebody else?" An enigma that the Jews had to kind of overcome because the One that they were waiting for they never saw as having to suffer and die. They just saw Him as ruling and reigning, and so they missed His first coming.

Notice we read here, "Behold, He is coming with clouds." We mentioned to you a couple of weeks ago that at the rapture Jesus will catch away all of the saints from the earth in the twinkling of an eye into the clouds. He won't come to the earth, He'll stay in the clouds. We meet Him in the air, caught up with Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17, 1 Corinthians 15:52 as well). This is speaking of this surprise, this coming without warning; it's described as "a thief in the night" (1

Thessalonians 5:2) not for the saints but for the world. It's going to be a shock. At the rapture, He will not be seen by everyone. He will not return to the earth. He won't yet come to rule, but He'll take you to be where He is. And the dead in Christ will rise, and our new bodies will be given to us, and then we will one day return. However, when the Lord returns a second time to rule and reign, the Scriptures also say He'll come in the clouds; but it speaks in the sense of being seen by everyone. And He will end up upon the earth. So we read in Daniel, for example, in chapter 7:13-14, Daniel wrote, "I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed." Jesus, in describing to the Pharisees the last days, said in chapter 24:29-30 of Matthew, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Greg Laurie used to say, "And with Greg Laurie," and I'd say, "No, 'great glory' is what it says." (Laughing) But if he tells you that, don't believe him. That's just not going to be. Well, he may get to come, but I'm pretty sure that's not the way the original reads.

"Every eye will see Him." Now, when the Lord took Him, ascended, the angel said "The way you saw Him leave, He'll come again" (Acts 1:10-11). That applies to both the rapture and certainly the second coming. But at the second coming, "every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him." We read here, "And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him." In the middle of the verse, we move, if you will, seven years forward from the rapture to the second coming and to the end of the Tribulation. "Every eye will see Him." It is prophetic, by the way, of the nation of Israel, who has yet to acknowledge their Lord because they expect one to rule. And He's coming to do that. He didn't come the first time to do that, and they missed Him. Zechariah wrote, in chapters 12 and 13, about, "then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son" (Zechariah 12:10). Zechariah 13:6 says, "One will say to him, 'What are these wound between your arms?' Then he will answer, 'Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.' " So it'll be quite a revelation day for the nation when the Lord returns. But it is applicable, obviously, to all men. There are cults today

that have said to you and me, over the last 100 years, "Oh, the Lord has come in secret." That's not in my Bible. When He comes, "every eye will see Him." There's no secret coming of the Lord. But notice that the coming of the Lord will bring a lot of mourning to the hearts of the people. But I'll tell you what. According to the Bible, and I think I'll be able to show you that by the time we get there, when the Lord returns, literally all of Israel that survives will be saved. Not some, but all. All will go, "He's the One, He's the One," and the nation is going to turn to Him en masse and believe in Him. So, the second coming of the Lord at the end of the Great Tribulation will open the eyes of every man (chapter 19). For those who have survived, there's a verse in Isaiah 25:9 that says, "And it will be said in that day: 'Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.' "

That's the proclamation of the people that see the Lord's return. So, I think it's going to be quite a day. I don't know. "Every eye will see Him." We have satellite TV now; it should be easy.

Now we've been raptured, like I said, seven years previously. Millions of us will return with Him as we're told in Jude (verse 14) or in Colossians (3:4), and we'll get the specifics of that when we get a little further in. So John speaks in preview of the coming of the Lord - visibly, certainly and victoriously.

Three verses of introduction, four or five verses of greeting, and then this word in verse 8, the words of Jesus Himself, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." And the words that are used to describe the Father in verse 4 are now used exactly to describe the Son in verse 8, the "I am" trademark. Right? "Unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24). "Before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58). At the arrest in the garden, they said, "We're looking for Jesus," and He said, "I am" (John 18:5-6). He didn't say, "Here I am." He just said, "I am." And they all fell down backwards. You remember that. God identified Himself to Moses with the same title (Exodus 3:6, 14).

The words "Alpha and Omega," I'm sure you know, are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. It just means the beginning and the end. Jesus, by whom the world was created, will make an end of all things as well. He's the First, He's the Last. By the way, that's exactly the way the Father is referred to in Revelation 21:6. So, ten times in the entire Bible, and nine of them here in the book of Revelation, Jesus uses the title "Almighty." It's a great word, really, because it

literally means to rule over everything. Omnipotent One. That would be the way that you could describe this word. Jesus has no limits to His power. He is God. He will end things. He will carry out His Word. His promises will be fulfilled. So will His judgment. And no one's going to stop Him. He's the One that we're coming to learn in this book, right? He's the One that we're going to worship. You excited about that yet? God's gonna be doing great things in our midst.

Next week - we call next week "Face to Face With Jesus." And I think John, poor guy in his 90's, wants to hang on to angina or something, "I'm not gonna make it." Imagine standing before the Lord in all of His glory, on the Lord's day, with a loud voice and a trumpet. And the Lord begins by saying what He said in verse 8, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last. Write this in a book, John. Write it to these churches. Here's what I am. Here, tell them what you've seen." And then he gets to describe Jesus. It's gonna be amazing. And then we'll spend seven weeks in chapters 2 and 3 and look at what the Lord wants to say to the church. That's you and me. What can we pick up from all of these lessons? I just finished chapter 3 today. I am so excited! If you want to stay six hours, we can do the whole thing right now. (Laughing) I'm that excited. But I'll probably drop. Okay, let's pray, shall we?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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