

## John hears the voice of our risen Lord Revelation 1:4-18

As we begin a series of sermons on readings from the book of Revelation, there are a couple of passages I'd like you to keep in mind. One comes from the apostle Paul as he is ending his first mission journey. He encourages followers of Jesus by telling them, "*We must go through many troubles on our way to the kingdom of God*" (Acts 14:22). The other passage I'd like you to consider is a promise that our Savior made about his church in Matthew chapter 16. Jesus promised, "*The gates of hell will not overpower it*" (16:18). We'll keep those thoughts in mind as we study Revelation: trouble will always follow Christ's church; and Christ church will always have final victory.

There's another more personal note as we begin this series on Revelation. When I was a student at our seminary some 35 years ago, we were told not to preach on Revelation until we had been in the ministry 30 years. Our professors thought that we needed a good hold on the rest of Scripture before we tackled Revelation. After 30 plus years in the ministry, I guess I'm ready to give it a go.

Today we cover the opening chapter of Revelation when the apostle John is approached by our risen and ascended Savior. Our Lord tells John to record the visions that he sees. Already in the opening chapter there are different pictures that require some interpretation. We pray that God's Spirit will give us understanding as we consider this opening chapter when John hears the voice of our risen Lord. In these opening verses we pray John will fortify our status with God. Our Savior's appearance to John will remind us of his saving power.

John begins by reminding us of our status with God. *John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace to you and peace.* John's letter sounds similar to other writers of Scripture. We hear the words, "Grace and peace to you in many New Testament epistles. *Grace* summarizes all the gifts of God that come to us through Jesus. They are gifts. They are not what we deserve. We deserve God's punishment for our sin. But God gives us the opposite of what we deserve: his love and forgiveness. That is grace. *Peace* sums up all the blessings that are ours as a result of God's grace. We have peace with God. There is peace for our troubled conscience. There is peace for our heart and soul.

This grace and peace comes to us from the triune God. *Grace to you and peace from him who is, who was, and who is coming, and from the seven spirits that are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.* John makes mention of God the Father who is and who was, and who is coming. He never changes. He remains the same God who is true to his promises. The seven spirits that are before his throne could be referring to the Holy Spirit. This seven-fold description of the Spirit takes us back to Isaiah chapter 11: *The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him: the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.* (11:2).

The description of Jesus Christ as "*the faithful witness*" reminds us of his work as our prophet. He brought us the true knowledge of God. That he's "*the firstborn from the dead*" points to his priestly office in his sacrificial death on a cross and his glorious resurrection. Now forgiveness is available to every soul for every sin ever committed. He's also our king who governs all other rulers and uses them to carry out his divine purpose. "*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his own blood...*" Jesus is described as the one "*who loves us.*" His is ongoing, eternal love which never wavers from one day to the next. He freed us

from our sins by his blood. His work was completed when he shed his blood and gave up his life to pay the wages of our sins. He set us free from the punishment we deserve.

Jesus has not only freed us from punishment. He has given us an exalted position. He has *“made us a kingdom and priests to God his Father—to him be the glory and the power forever. Amen.”* Not only has he made us to be a kingdom. We are also priests—a royal priesthood as the apostle Peter would write. We have the right to approach God directly with prayer—anytime, anyplace.

As this book begins and ends, we are reminded of his second coming. *Look, he is coming with clouds, and every eye will see him, including those who pierced him. And all the nations of the earth will mourn because of him. Yes. Amen.* Just as he disappeared in a cloud at his ascension, so he will reappear again in the clouds in a visible second coming to judge all humanity. Every eye will see him. The soldiers who pierced him will be there too. All his enemies will cower at the sight of him. But not those of us who long for his appearance. We will be crowned with righteousness that matches our Savior’s righteousness that we wear by faith.

John was exiled to the island of Patmos, a small island where the Roman government exiled certain prisoners. John knew why he was sent there. It was because of the word of God and the testimony about Jesus. Persecution had broken out against the Christian church. And John a leader of the Christian church and proclaimer of Christ crucified and risen from the dead, must be made an example. Though the government was against him, John knew God was for him. This disciple whom Jesus loved was still loved by God and could look ahead to a glorious existence in paradise. That’s our goal as well. We just finished another Lenten season where our Savior displayed his great love for us. And his rising from the grave, like we celebrated last Sunday, we’re assured of sins forgiven and an eternal home with our Lord. And no matter what this life might throw at us. Even if we were forced to stay clear of other Christians, we know our status in God’s kingdom is secure because of Christ.

Now we consider our Savior’s appearance to John. We’ll see how our Savior’s appearance remind us of his saving power. John tells us, *“I was in spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard a loud voice behind me, like a trumpet, saying, ‘Write what you see on a scroll and send it to the seven churches...’* In the spiritual state in which John found himself—able to see and hear things that are normally not seen or heard—a state in which visions are perceived, John heard a voice commanding him to write in a book the vision he would see. He then would send what he writes to the seven churches that are mentioned.

*I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me. When I turned, I saw seven gold lampstands, and among the lampstands was one like a son of man.* When John turned to see who was speaking, he saw *“one, like a son of man.”* John saw someone who looked like a human being. This heavenly visitor had hair, eyes, hands, and feet like a human being. Yet he was remarkably different.

John saw him standing among the seven lampstands. Jesus had spoken of his disciples as the light of the world. He had compared their conversion to faith as to the lighting of a candle. That Jesus was standing in the midst of the seven lampstands sets forth the truth that our ascended Lord, who is now at the right hand of God, is at the same time with his people here on earth. He had promised where two or three gather in his name, he is with them. After commissioning his followers to gather disciples from every nation by baptizing and teaching, he promised to be with us always till the end of time.

John describes him further: *He was clothed with a robe that reached to his feet, and around his chest he wore a gold sash. His head and his hair were white, like white wool or like snow. His eyes were like blazing flames.* The whiteness of his head and hair do not reflect old age. It's the fact that he is sinless and pure. The eyes of God always have some connection with God's knowledge or with his concern for people. The ability of Jesus to see into the darkest recesses of a human heart may fit the description of the eyes of Jesus as blazing flames.

John writes: *His feet were like polished bronze being refined in a furnace. His voice was like the roar of many waters. He held seven stars in his right hand. A sharp two-edged sword was coming out of his mouth.* Jesus' feet may have something to do with his authority and the exercise of his power over his enemies. They must serve as his footstool. The sound of his voice compared to a thunderous waterfall point to the power of his word. In the Old Testament, the voice of God is described as the sound of rushing water (Ezekiel 43:2). It is by his Word that he rules his kingdom. And that kingdom is found in the heart of all who listen to him by faith.

The seven stars in his hand are described in the last verse of the chapter: *"The seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches"* (1:20). The two-edged sword coming out of his mouth is his Word. Paul speaks of God's Word as a sword in Ephesians chapter 6 (6:17). The Book of Hebrews calls it a two-edged sword (4:12).

*His face was shining as the sun shines in all its brightness.* Once before on the Mount of Transfiguration, John had seen Jesus demonstrate his glory in the same way. The same Jesus who had suffered humiliation and death on a cross, had experienced all kinds of persecution that his followers were now enduring, now he occupies an exalted position as ruler of the whole earth. What happened to Jesus would someday happen to them.

John was so overwhelmed by the majesty of Jesus that he fell at his feet and fainted. But Jesus raised him and told him to "stop being afraid." Mankind's fall into sin brought fear into the world. Before the fall into sin, people knew God as a holy judge who will not tolerate any disobedience. Before the fall, mankind had no reason to fear God. They had not transgressed any of his laws. They also knew God as the loving source of all that is good. After the fall people no longer knew God's love. They could only fear God. That is why Adam and Eve hid from God in the bushes in the Garden (Genesis 3:10). Jesus' words, "Do not be afraid" are a fitting antidote to mankind's fear. That's the message God gave angels in the earliest historical accounts of the New Testament. They are spoken to John in the final historical account of the New Testament. *"Fear not"* is a liberating call to put away all fear. It's just as our risen Savior told his disciples who were locked away in fear: Peace be with you.

Jesus is the living one. Because of his death and resurrection, he claims for himself the keys of death and hell. He has the power to release men from death. He promised his disciples: *"Because I live, you also shall live."* What great comfort to Christians in the day of persecution. Even the executioner's sword cannot place a believing child of God beyond Jesus' power to help. That Jesus has the keys to the grave means he has the power to release from the grave. Jesus' power extends beyond the boundaries of this present life. What a comfort for any church, especially those facing persecution.

Do you remember the verses we want to keep in mind. *"We must go through many troubles on our way to the kingdom of God"* and *"The gates of hell will not overpower it."* With our risen Savior in our midst we are safe. We are secure. We are certain of final victory.