

Who Is, Was, and Is to Come
(Sermon 2 – Rev. 1:4-8)
9.8.24

Please turn in your Bibles to the Book of Revelation, chapter 1.

Let me ask a question this morning that I want you to consider: When was the last time you were amazed? Maybe it was a visit to the Grand Canyon, or maybe the birth of a child.

God created this world, and He filled our lives with blessings, that we would be look around and be amazed – not ultimately at creation, but that we would be amazed at the Creator.

As a Christian, maybe you remember the first time you heard the good news of the gospel, the first time God revealed His love for you, and the price that Jesus paid on the cross for your sins. And that truly is amazing.

But if we're honest, we are not always amazed at the gospel. Christian author Paul Tripp describes it as “yawning in the face of glory”. He writes this...

*“You could argue that between the ‘already’ of our coming to Christ and the ‘not yet’ of our final home going, all of life is one big war of awe. You see, by God’s design you and I were hardwired for awe. We long to be amazed, to experience wonder, and to have something great to live for...
...This means that each us will live in awe of something, and what captures your awe will shape the direction of your life and the way you respond to the things you face every day. Jesus came to give us our awe back again.”*

And as we walk through the Book of Revelation, I believe that is what Jesus wants to do – to give us our awe back again. And specifically in our verses today, that we would look upon this amazing Savior, and we would be freshly amazed.

Today, we will be focusing on verses 4-8 of chapter one. Let’s read, and then we’ll pray...

[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 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. [8] "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

(PRAY)

If you have headings in your Bible, you may have a heading in this section that says something like "Greeting to the Seven Churches". That's true, it is a greeting. But it is much more than that. This greeting also reveals amazing truths of God Himself – the God of this revelation, what He has done for His people, and how His people should respond in worship.

And specifically, these verses give us four aspects of the person and work of Christ that are meant to give us back our awe and worship of the Lord...

I. The Lord is our source of Grace and Peace

[1:4] John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace...

Grace and Peace

John is again identified as the human author, and the original intended audience is seven specific churches in Asia.

And then, like so many other letters in the NT, we see this two-fold greeting, of "grace and peace". Now when we write emails to one another or we see each other, we often greet one another by saying things like, "How are you? How's it going?" with no real intention behind it.

But this greeting is different. "Grace and peace" are meant to convey something very intentional.

"Grace" is unmerited favor. It means we get the blessings of God that we don't deserve, and we don't get the punishment we do deserve. This grace is promised in the OT, and fulfilled in the New, when Jesus goes to the cross and takes the punishment for our sins.

And while grace is mainly a NT term, peace is an OT word. It is the Hebrew word “Shalom” which means a complete wholeness, lacking nothing. All is reconciled and as it should be.

So when you put these two together (grace and peace) you are joining together the beginning of God’s word, and the end of God’s word, the promises and predictions of the Old Covenant, now fulfilled in the New Covenant in Christ.

And that order – grace, then peace – is important. Because it is only by God’s grace that we can have God’s peace. Only by God graciously providing the remedy to our sin through faith in Christ, can we know true peace with God and be welcomed into covenant relationship with Him.

So when you read that greeting in the Bible, “Grace and peace be to you”, stop and consider what that means, that you’ve been given this amazing gift of God’s grace and God’s peace through our Lord Jesus.

And John says that God is the source of these blessings. Look at the rest of v. 4 - 5...

“...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...”

This grace and peace we celebrate comes from “him who is, and who was, and who is to come”. This describes God the Father. We will come back to that a little later.

Then he says, “from the seven spirits who are before his throne”. Now this is a strange description, one we are not positive of its meaning, but most likely refers to the Holy Spirit. Remember how the number seven appears all through the Book of Revelation, and that it means perfection, completion. And where this description is placed (between the Father and the Son) as one of the givers of grace and peace, it makes sense for us to assume John is describing the Holy Spirit.

And at the beginning of verse 5, we have the Son, Jesus Christ. So, Father, Son, Spirit – three distinct persons, in perfect harmony and unity with one another, as the One True God. (We’re still in the greeting of this letter, and already we are being amazed and in awe of the mystery of our Triune God!)

He is the one who generously provides the grace and peace we need to be in right relationship with Him. And therefore, we should trust Him to provide everything else we need. Trust Him to lead you in the situations of your life that you can't make sense of, that you can't seem to change, the areas where you struggle, where you fail, where you realize you don't have all the answers – He does. You don't have the strength – He does. You don't have the wisdom – He does.

The Lord God is your source. Look to Him. He is your grace and your peace. And He will withhold nothing good from His children.

2. The Lord Is Our Savior and Sovereign King (v. 5)

[1:5] and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

So after pointing to the Trinity as the source of our grace and peace, John focuses exclusively on the person of Jesus. Just in case we would forget or get distracted by dates and charts and timelines, John is making it clear that this letter is from Jesus, about Jesus, so that the people of Jesus would be in awe of Jesus!

And here, John describes Jesus in three distinct ways:

- First, ***the Faithful Witness***. John was a faithful witness to what God showed Him. But John is not THE faithful witness. Jesus is.

That word “witness” in the Greek is where we get our word for “martyr” – someone who dies for a cause. Jesus not only taught what the Father gave Him to teach, and spoke what the Father gave Him to speak, but with His very life, Jesus died fulfilling the mission the Father gave Him to fulfill.

And that was meant as an encouragement for the 7 churches this letter was written to – the churches who were suffering and being persecuted and some even being put to death, that they would be encouraged to stand firm in the faith, to faithfully endure persecution, by looking to Jesus, THE Faithful Witness.

- Second, John calls Jesus ***“the Firstborn of the dead”***. Thankfully, Jesus didn't stay dead, but He rose again. This reminds those martyrs ready to give their lives for Christ, that because Christ rose from the dead,

we will too. For those who trust in Christ, His resurrection is the guarantee of our resurrection.

Colossians reminds us that Jesus is the head of the body and the firstborn from the dead, so that in everything he might be preeminent, over all things. Jesus was the first to defeat death, and therefore He sovereignly rules over everything, even death.

-Third, Jesus is called **“the Ruler of the kings of the earth”**. In other words, He is the King of kings.

No emperor, no Caesar, no government or ruler or king of men is greater than Our King Jesus. Every other scepter will be broken under His authority. Every other crown will be cast at His nail-scarred feet. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is King and Lord and Sovereign Ruler over all.

How encouraging that is in persecution and trial. It builds our faith to know that Christ is all we need, and that Christ rules over every aspect of our lives.

And how do we respond to that? We worship. That’s what John does. In the following verses, he breaks into the first of several doxologies in the Book of Revelation.

A doxology is a moment of spontaneous praise and adoration of God. Doxa means “glory”. It’s a moment where the writer pauses his stream of thought and just worships God and gives Him glory.

And here in the second part of v 5, John breaks into this praise of the saving work of Jesus...

[5b] 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.

Because of Jesus’ great love for us, He freed us from our sin. Notice it doesn’t say here that He “washed” us with His blood. The stains of sin are not in view, but the chains of sin are – the imprisonment, the bondage of sin that once enslaved our souls.

We were once bound and held prisoner in our sin, but Jesus came and “freed” us, He rescued us. His blood paid the debt we owed, the ransom

for our freedom. By His death on the cross, through His shed blood, the blood of the perfect, spotless Lamb of God, all who trust in Him are free from the chains of sin and shame, from the prison of condemnation and separation from God. We have been rescued from the prison of darkness and delivered to the kingdom of light. And he whom the Son sets free is free indeed!

And that's not all. Verse 6 says that Jesus...

"...made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father.."

Jesus could have freed us from our sin and that would have been enough. But he took us and made us His own. He called us by His name, changing our very identity.

Back in Exodus 19, God made Israel this promise...

"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." (Exod 19:5-6)

What God promised to His people Israel, He has fulfilled in His People, the Church. Revelation 1:6 is that fulfillment.

God's people are no longer defined by borders of a country, but by the bloodline of Christ. No longer accepted by works of the Law, but by faith in Christ, and His shed blood, which fulfills every demand of the Law.

King Jesus has made us part of His kingdom. Once His enemies, now seated at His table.

And not only part of His kingdom, but John says that through Christ we are made priests to God. In the OT, a priest is one who would go to God representing man, and would go to man representing God. In the New Covenant, we have no need for a hierarchy of priests, offering sacrifices on our behalf. We have One Mediator, Jesus Christ, who is just and the justifier, who is the High Priest who offers the sacrifice and is also the Lamb who was sacrificed. He is the object of our faith, as well as the author of our faith. Jesus is everything from beginning to end!

And those who trust in Him are given their identity in Him. Namely, Jesus has made us priests to the Father, which means as followers of Christ, we

are His ambassadors to this world – not to go and do the work of redemption, for that is already done. But we are to represent Christ to the world, to go and tell the good news of the redemption He has already purchased, preaching it to every person, everywhere, at home and abroad, pointing them to Jesus.

“Are you living like a priest, worshiping God and helping others know God? Does your life announce that glory belongs to Jesus? The one flows from the other: those who know God most have the most reason to worship, for worship is our response to what God reveals of himself...

...And from there, those who see God and enjoy him in worship will also have most reason to serve as ambassadors of Christ, urging all to be reconciled to God through faith in Christ.”

- James Hamilton

Let that be our prayer, that the Lord would help us to live as priests, as His representatives on the earth, ministers of reconciliation, servants of God and stewards of the mystery of the gospel.

And in it all, that we would echo John’s praise - **“To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”** Jesus gets all the credit. He gets all the praise. He is the one with all the power. He is the Savior who died for our sins, and He is the Sovereign King who is coming again.

And speaking of His return, John reminds us that Jesus is...

III. The Lord is the Soon-Coming Judge

(v. 7)

[1:7] 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.

It’s as if John can’t wait for the big reveal – He wants to shout it from the rooftops even here at the beginning of the letter, that Jesus is coming again. He is coming with the clouds. As Jesus ascended into the clouds, He will return the same way. And notice it says, “every eye will see Him”.

Now, we know there are certain clues we will pick up along the way in our study of Revelation that will help us later on in the letter. This is one of those clues – that “every eye will see Him”.

Now this could be one of those areas where what you've always believed about Christ's return may be challenged. The idea of a secret rapture of Christ, where Jesus secretly removes all the Christians and we all mysteriously vanish, with all the non-Christians left to wonder what happened – that concept is not in the Bible.

I realize that may be a shock for some, especially with all the "Left Behind" books and movies that were popular years ago. It makes for good drama, but a *secret* return of Christ and a *secret* removal of the saints is not in the Bible. Christ certainly does return, and He does gather His people, but as verse 7 says, "every eye will see Him." But more on that in a later sermon.

John says, "Even those who pierced Him" will see Him. Every person, not just the Roman soldiers who crucified Him, but everyone throughout history, who ever rejected Christ and what He did for us, all who refused to surrender their lives to Jesus. They, too, will see His return. And it will not be a happy time for them.

John writes that "all tribes of the earth will wail on account of Him." They will weep and mourn at Christ's return – not weeping as one who repents, because when Christ returns it will be too late to repent. No, this describes all the people of the earth who rejected Jesus, that when He returns, at that moment, they will realize how wrong they have been – persecuting Christians, following false religions, making fun of those who trusted in the Bible, ridiculing those awaiting Christ's return.

In that moment, all those people, from every tribe and nation and language on the earth, they will see Christ's return, they will realize how they rejected the truth and believed a lie, and they will grieve, knowing that their judgment is at hand.

"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn". (Zech 12:10)

In the midst of John's doxology and praise, in the middle of proclaiming Christ's glory and His power, we are reminded that Christ's return will not be a joyful occasion for everyone. For many on the earth, it will be a time of great terror and tears.

And how does John respond to this truth? He proclaims at the end of v. 7, “**Even so. Amen.**” Amen means “so be it”. John is saying, Even so, even though this will be a terrible time for some, let it be. So be it.

John isn’t being flippant or uncaring. He is rejoicing in the justice of God, knowing that Jesus has taken our judgment for us, and that the judgment of God, while fearful for those who do not trust in Christ, it is a source of peace and joy for God’s people, knowing He will one day make all things right.

The world will mourn His return, but the Church should celebrate it. We excitedly, longingly await that day. For those who have trusted in Christ’s blood, we know our sins are already judged at the cross. Jesus already took our shame and judgment and rejection. It is paid for!

Because of that, all who trust in Christ should look forward to His appearing with great anticipation, with great joy, and with the heart-felt excitement that says, “Yes! Let it be! Come Lord Jesus!”

And, knowing that the Judge is soon coming, it should cause us to urgently, diligently share the gospel with those who don’t yet know Christ, that when He returns, instead of weeping, they may rejoice too!

And now, the last picture John gives us to awaken our awe of the Lord...

IV. The Lord is the Eternal, Almighty

[1:8] “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

Now, you’ll notice this is a repeat of verse 4, where John describes God the Father as “**him who is and who was and who is to come**”. I said we would come back to that.

Verse 8 is a powerful verse. And here’s why:

There are only two times in the Book of Revelation we see God the Father speaking directly. This is one of those times.

After all of this description and doxology of Jesus, the Father interjects His agreement. This is the Father’s “Amen” to the testimony of His Son.

If you'll remember back in the Gospels, this happened a couple of other times. One was at Jesus' baptism, when the voice of the Father was heard saying, "This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." The other was at Jesus' transfiguration, when He gave 3 of His disciples a glimpse of His true glory, and the voice of the Father spoke saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!"

Here in Revelation 1:8, the Father again is interjecting His approval of His Son – Father God saying "Amen" as God's people praise Jesus.

And He does this by declaring His endorsement, His divine signature, saying, "I am the Alpha and Omega..." which are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. God is saying, "I AM the A to Z". I'm not only the beginning and the end, but everything in-between as well.

That's why this added description is helpful. God the Father is the "**one who is, who was, and who is to come**". He is right now, He was from eternity past, and He will be into eternity future. There is never a time when God was not. And He will always be.

God identified Himself in a similar way to Moses at the burning bush. When Moses asked "Who shall I say sent me?" God answered "Tell them I AM sent you." The Great I AM.

If He were only "past", we could just say, "He was". If He were only in the future, we would say, "God will be". But God is ever present, over all things, before all things, holding all things together, with us, in us, and will never forsake us. All things exist for His glory. He is the "I AM", who is and was and is to come. God is the first the last, the beginning the end, the God of all history, of all creation, and of every detail of your life.

And that is meant to comfort you, to cause you to be in awe.

And He is the "Almighty", the name most often used for God in the Book of Revelation. It means He is the one with all the power, and rules over everything, forever.

The name "Almighty" is meant to be an encouragement for God's people - originally for the churches in Asia enduring persecution from human rulers - that they would remember that our God is the one in charge, the real Ruler, the real King over all.

But this is also an encouragement for all of God's people for all time - that we would be reminded there is nothing outside of God's sight, nothing outside of God's power, and nothing more powerful than God's love for us.

Take comfort, the Eternal watches over... you. The Almighty loves...you. He is ever present in your life. His is unchanging. And He alone is God.

Conclusion

May these descriptions of our God not only encourage us in our times of trial, but may they remind us of the God we serve, that we would return to a sense of awe and wonder, that we would once again worship Him in Spirit and in truth.

In the times when we forget, when we grow cold, when our faith grows weak, that we would remember the bigness of our God – the height of His power, and the depth of His love for us.

While we sing of Him now, one day we will sing our praises to Him around His throne. Right now we pray to one we cannot see, but one day we will praise Him face-to-face.

As we long for that Day, may our hearts be filled with worship of Him, and our lives be lived in awe of His glory.

(Let's Pray)