

SLIDE ONE

Revelation Part II

Last week we began our series on Revelation, covering some preliminary basic points and the conditions the churches in Asia were facing as they received the message of Revelation.

We noted that there was a blessing promised to those who read aloud the messages and so we will continue to read aloud, picking up from where we left off last Sunday.

I would also suggest to you that this series will be more meaningful to you if you bring your Bibles to follow along and do some review at home. The complete transcript of the message, and references to the scriptures used are available to you on the ‘sermons’ page of our website.

Beginning to read at verse four:

Grace and peace to you from the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come; from the sevenfold Spirit before his throne; and from Jesus Christ. He is the faithful witness to these things, the first to rise from the dead, and the ruler of all the kings of the world. All glory to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by shedding his blood for us. He has made us a Kingdom of priests for God his Father. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen.

So, we see again in that first verse the reaffirmation of the trinity. First the eternal God the Father, then with seven again being understood to mean completeness, we see the sevenfold or complete ministry of the Spirit, and then the second person of the trinity our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now note carefully in the second sentence Jesus is proclaimed to be accomplishing six things. As you will see as we examine these six things that there is nothing new here. These points would have already been made in the teaching that these folks would have received.

But the words here are powerful reminders of these key truths, with the intent that hearing and meditating on these truths will help these persecuted believers to remain strong and faithful.

First, Jesus our Lord is the faithful witness. The Greek word translated as ‘witness’ is an interesting one. It can mean witness as in the sense of someone testifying at a trial or it can mean martyr.

In his role as the living word, Jesus was a faithful witness while on earth. He spoke the truth about sin and righteousness.

He spoke the truth about the coming Kingdom. And he was the faithful witness to the churches because as we saw last week, God’s message was passed to him to pass onto John to give to the churches.

But he was also the first Christian martyr, the first one to die for the sake of the Christian faith.

He was sinless and guiltless but was crucified, willingly dying.

He was the faithful witness even unto death to make our salvation and our faith in a better tomorrow possible.

His life and death set a high standard for those who would subsequently decide to follow Jesus.

They, and subsequently us, would be expected to follow his example, remain true and faithful even to death.

Secondly, Jesus is the first after salvation and eternal life was purchased at the cross to rise from the dead.

These words from Revelation affirm Paul's teaching in I Corinthians 15:20 (NLT) where he writes:

“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept.”

The term ‘first fruits’ implies that there is more harvest to come. Remember these folks in the Asian churches were under severe persecution. Some of them were about to give their life for their Christian witness.

They were about to take on both meanings of the Greek word, they would be witnesses in a verbal sense continuing to speak about sin and what was accomplished at the cross, but they would also become martyrs.

These words were intended as a reminder, a hopeful reminder, that for those who die in Christ they will be part of the greater harvest from the dead.

Even if they were to be martyred for their faith, they would be part of the greater resurrection harvest.

Thirdly, *“the ruler of all the kings of the world”*.

This statement affirms the words of the prophet Daniel spoken hundreds of years before our Lord's arrival on earth.

In Daniel 2:20 (NLT) we read:

“Praise the name of God forever and ever, for he has all wisdom and power. He controls the course of world events; he removes kings and sets up other kings.”

And in Matthew 28: 18 (NLT)

Jesus announces to his followers that all authority has been transferred to him.

18 Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth.

And so, John here is legitimately proclaiming to those who would become listeners to the message from Revelation that Jesus was indeed in charge of world affairs and the ruler of all the kings of the world.

Now I am sure that these folks who were under persecution would at least from time to time be having some difficulty with this statement.

Perhaps they would be recalling these words from Daniel and thinking why does God allow these Roman Caesars to continue to rule inflicting on us torture and death?

I’m sure that many felt this way during the wars of the twentieth century. Why does God allow all this? We do not have the big picture.

Many of you will be familiar with the beautiful hand-woven Persian rugs. Countless single threads intricately woven into a beautiful picture.

Someone has accurately said that it is impossible to see the beautiful picture by finding a single thread from the rug.

We simply do not have the big picture. We live and operate in a world where single threads distress us.

At times it is difficult for us to understand what purpose God would have in allowing brutal dictators to rise to power.

It is part of our struggle as humans and as believers. While we read these scriptures, which remind us that God is in control, we sometimes struggle to understand what is going on because we do not have the big picture.

We may struggle to understand why God allows things like pandemics. But we must believe from scripture that he is ultimately in control.

We learn from scripture specific examples where God set up kings and took down kings to accomplish his purposes.

In II Kings 19:35 (NLT) we see where God supernaturally protected the nation and their godly king from King Sennacherib of Assyria.

That night the angel of the LORD went out to the Assyrian camp and killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. When the surviving Assyrians woke up the next morning, they found corpses everywhere. Then King Sennacherib of Assyria broke camp and returned to his own land. He went home to his capital of Nineveh and stayed there.

This defeat essentially finished the rule of Sennacherib. Before long he was assassinated by his own sons.

And in II Kings chapter twenty-five we see where God allowed King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to capture

Jerusalem. It was part of God's plan to punish Judah for their sin and disregard of repeated warnings.

But later in Daniel we see where God removed Nebuchadnezzar because of his pride.

So, God sends this message to the persecuted churches of Asia.

Regardless of what you see going on around you, regardless of what is happening to you God is ultimately in control. He will continue to set up and take down kings and governments to accomplish his purposes, your calling is to remain true and faithful.

Fourthly, the text reads: *All glory to him who loves us...*

In John 15:13 (NLT) Jesus tells his disciples:

There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

The willingness of Jesus to willingly suffer and die for our sin is the ultimate demonstration of love.

Someone has said that the heart of the gospel is effectively encapsulated in the simple Sunday School song 'Jesus Loves me'.

"Jesus Loves Me" is one of the most popular Christian hymns around the world, especially among children. The hymn was first written by Anna B. Warner in 1860 as a poem. Anna's sister Susan requested a poem for a dying child and Anna wrote the wonderful words of Jesus Loves Me to bring comfort and peace.

This poem of comfort was eventually put to music and has continued to comfort those going through difficulty with simple words but the scripturally sound fact that Jesus does indeed love us.

What sort of love would result in the son of God setting aside his position in glory? What sort of love would motivate him to come to earth to be hated, tortured, and crucified so that you and I could go free?

Jesus is the ultimate example of a man laying down his life for his friends.

John in his first letter chapter four verse nineteen captures what should be our natural response to the fact that Jesus loves us.

We love him, because he first loved us.

I trust you see the degree in which he has demonstrated his love for us, and that you have responded by loving him.

Fifthly, *He has freed us from our sins by shedding his blood for us.*

In Galatians 3:13 (NLT) we read:

But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing.

And in Galatians 4: 4-7 (NLT) we read:

But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us

as his very own children. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.” Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.

The Lord is our freedom giver. He has freed us from the curse of the law. Past tense, its over.

He has freed us from the penalty of sin. Past tense, he has already done it!

He has freed us from guilt. Therefore, there is no longer any condemnation to those who are in Christ.

From Romans 8:1-2 (NLT)

So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.

It would appear that those who would receive this message of Revelation were being reminded that should death come their way, they were indeed free from all these things.

Sixthly, he made us *a Kingdom of priests for God his Father.*

Priests in the Old Testament paced the role of intercessor. They organized the sacrifices used as a temporary propitiation to deal with the sins of the people.

Priests interceded with prayers to God on behalf of the people.

The people were restricted from entering the holy places. And even the priests operated under strict rules and procedures.

Everything must be followed very carefully. And the Holiest of holies, the very presence of God was only available to a single priest, the high priest and then only once a year.

But what a change Jesus and his death on the cross brought to that worship system.

In Matthew 27: 51 & 52 (NLT) we read this about the death of Jesus on the cross:

Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit. At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

The veil in the temple kept people from entering the Holiest of Holies. It was a constant reminder that they could not be close to the presence of God because the sin in their lives could not be tolerated.

It was no flimsy curtain. It is thought to have been about 50 feet high and as thick as four inches.

Miraculously ripped in two at the moment of our Lord's death indicating that now you and I could enter God's presence without fear because our sin problem has been completely resolved on that old, rugged cross.

In Ephesians 3:12 (NLT) Paul writes:

Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence.

In 1916 Noah Herrell wrote a hymn entitled "The Unveiled Christ"

The lyrics of the chorus go:

*O behold the man of sorrows,
O behold Him in plain view;
Lo! He is the mighty conqueror,
Since He rent the veil in two.
Lo! He is the mighty conqueror,
Since He rent the veil in two.*

Now I want to ask you this morning have you claimed this freedom?

Are you exercising the victory that was won at Calvary?

There is no more veil! There is no more a need to bring your prayer requests to a priest and ask him to intercede on your behalf!

There is no more need to struggle with your human imperfections and weakness from a distance!

There is no more a need to have someone else organize activities of worship on your behalf!

The veil is gone! The need for a priest to intercede is gone.

You have the right, you have the privilege, you have the opportunity, as a child of God cleansed and made holy by the blood of Jesus to come directly into the presence of God, to

come without guilt or worry because your sins have been washed in the blood of the old, rugged cross.

You can bring your broken heart directly into the throne room!

You can bring your discouraged soul directly into the throne room, you can bring your deepest and most private prayer requests into the throne room before the awesome almighty King of the universe and you can feel and enjoy his welcome presence.

Are you exercising your rights as a blood washed believer? Are you taking advantage of what was won for you? Are you enjoying the benefits of the blood stained cross?

We now return to our reading in search of our promised blessing, and we pick up at chapter one verse seven:

Look! He comes with the clouds of heaven. And everyone will see him— even those who pierced him. And all the nations of the world will mourn for him. Yes! Amen!

I am the Alpha and the Omega—the beginning and the end,” says the Lord God. “I am the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come—the Almighty One.”

In Acts chapter one beginning at verse nine, (NLT) we read:

After saying this, he (Jesus) was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed

men suddenly stood among them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!”

Note carefully, he was taken up into a cloud and he will return in like manner.

The message to the persecuted believers is once again a reminder that this prediction some day is going to be fulfilled.

There is coming a day when there will be a visible return of King Jesus. A return that will be visible to all nations and all people.

How exactly will that happen? How will everyone on the planet simultaneously see his return?

We don't know exactly how this will happen, but we do know that with all the technology we have today, world-wide real time newscasts are indeed possible.

Can you imagine the immediate reaction for those who have ignored and rejected the love and message of Jesus?

Can you imagine the panic in the hearts of those soldiers who were participants in his crucifixion?

In Philippians chapter two beginning at verse nine (ESV) Paul writes:

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and

under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Revelation affirms that there is coming a day when this prediction will indeed be fulfilled.

As we have said at the outset, there are many aspects of Revelation that are constantly debated. I believe that had God wanted us to know every exact detail he would have laid it out clearly for us. But there are some important key messages that need no debate.

First, the church will face persecution and we are called to persevere, to remain faithful and true.

There are lots of aspects about our current pandemic that are hard to understand. But one thing is for sure. The church, that is the people who claim to be dedicated followers of Jesus are being tested.

Certainly not persecuted as severely as those folks in the Asian churches but tested at least to some degree.

Who will remain true, who will be the faithful witness? Who will be part of the great falling away?

Secondly Jesus is coming again. Are you ready?