

## Revelation 1:4-8, CEB

<sup>4</sup> John, to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace and peace to you from the one who is and was and is coming, and from the seven spirits that are before God's throne, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ—the faithful witness, the firstborn from among the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To the one who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, <sup>6</sup> who made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father—to him be glory and power forever and always. Amen.

<sup>7</sup> Look, he is coming with the clouds! Every eye will see him, including those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of him. This is so. Amen.

<sup>8</sup> "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "the one who is and was and is coming, the Almighty."<sup>1</sup>



## Sermon

Many of us experience moments when life feels like it's shifting around us. Maybe you're helping kids prepare for school starting in a few weeks, wondering where this summer went. Perhaps you're dealing with changes at work, health challenges in your family, or simply trying to figure out what comes next in some area of your life.

During these times, we often wonder if God really sees what we're going through. We need to know that even when everything feels uncertain, we're not alone. Followers of Jesus have always found hope during transitions by remembering who God really is and how God works in the world.

Today's message focuses on a powerful truth from John's vision: Jesus is walking among us right now, and he's coming again to make all things right. This isn't wishful thinking—it's the foundation of Christian hope.

Today we launch our new series "New Eyes: Seeing Possibilities in Times of Change" by examining how John opens the book of Revelation. In Revelation 1:4-8, John writes what looks like a simple letter greeting, but it's actually a bold declaration about who controls history and how God's people should live while waiting for Jesus to return. This opening passage establishes the foundation for everything that follows in both Revelation and our series.

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 1:4-8, CEB.

In the weeks ahead we'll be moving through the book of Revelation and we'll see the same Jesus who greets us here revealed through different images—sitting on heaven's throne, sacrificing himself as the Lamb, gathering people from every nation, protecting us from deception, and creating all things new. But first, we need to understand what John is telling us about Jesus' identity, his work among us now, and his promised return.

John's greeting in Revelation reminds me of a story about a college freshman named Jillian. She spent her entire first year at a prestigious university trying to prove she belonged there. While her roommate seemed effortlessly confident, Jillian studied until 3 AM many nights, joined every possible club, and constantly compared herself to classmates who appeared more prepared and capable.

One day, her grandmother sent a care package with an unexpected item tucked inside—Jillian's original acceptance letter from eighteen months earlier. Attached was a handwritten note: "I kept this to remind you that they chose you before you did anything to earn it. You belonged here from day one. Stop trying to prove what's already true."

Jillian sat on her dorm room floor, holding that letter, and something shifted inside her. She realized she'd been exhausting herself trying to earn a place that was already hers. But here's what's different about John's letter: it's not just about past acceptance—it's also about a future transformation that's coming for the whole world.

John wasn't writing to comfort one anxious college student. He was writing to entire churches facing life-threatening persecution, and his message had to be bigger than individual reassurance. To understand why his words carried such power for those first readers—and why they still matter for us today—we need to look carefully at every phrase he chose.

Let's examine what John actually writes in Revelation 1:4-8. John begins with what seems like a normal letter greeting: "John, to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace and peace to you." But notice where this grace and peace come from—not from John's good wishes, but from three sources that reveal the Trinity.

First, grace and peace come "from the one who is and was and is coming." This phrase appears twice in our passage, describing God the Father as the one who exists outside of time—past, present, and future all at once. When John was writing around 95 CE, the Roman emperor claimed to control the future. But John declares that the real God holds all of time in his hands.

Second, grace comes "from the seven spirits that are before God's throne." This probably refers to the Holy Spirit, with "seven" representing completeness and perfection. The Spirit isn't distant or abstract—the Spirit stands "before God's throne," meaning the Spirit has direct access to God's power and authority. This same Spirit works in our world today.

Third, grace comes "from Jesus Christ," and John immediately gives us three titles that explain who Jesus is and what he does. He's "the faithful witness"—in a world full of lies and propaganda, Jesus always tells the truth about God, about us, and about how the

world really works. He's "the firstborn from among the dead"—the first to be raised to new, eternal life that can never die again. And he's "the ruler of the kings of the earth"—more powerful than any president, dictator, or emperor who ever lived.

But John doesn't stop with Jesus' titles. He breaks into praise: "To the one who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, who made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father—to him be glory and power forever and always. Amen." Notice the order: Jesus loves us first, then frees us through his death on the cross, then gives us new roles as both citizens of God's kingdom and priests who serve God and others. This isn't something we earn—it's something Jesus accomplished and gives to us.

Then John makes a startling declaration: "Look, he is coming with the clouds! Every eye will see him, including those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of him. This is so. Amen."

This refers to Jesus' second coming, when he'll return visibly and publicly to establish God's justice on earth. "Those who pierced him" includes everyone who participated in his crucifixion, but also anyone who has rejected God's love. "All the tribes of the earth will mourn" because his return will expose every injustice and every way we've fallen short of God's intentions.

Finally, God speaks directly: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the one who is and was and is coming, the Almighty." Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, meaning God encompasses everything from beginning to end. God has the first word in creation and the last word in history.

This passage reveals something essential about how Methodists understand God's work in the world. John Wesley, who founded the Methodist movement in the 1700s, taught that God's grace operates in three ways that we see reflected in this text.

First, Wesley spoke of "prevenient grace"—God's love that comes before we ask for it. John's greeting shows this clearly: grace and peace come from God, not from our efforts to earn them. Wesley believed this grace reaches every person, preparing hearts to respond to God's love. When John writes "to the one who loves us," he's describing love that exists before we do anything to deserve it.

Second, Wesley taught about "justifying grace"—the moment when we accept God's forgiveness and become part of God's family. John describes this when he writes that Jesus "freed us from our sins by his blood." This isn't just forgiveness—it's liberation from everything that separates us from God. Wesley emphasized that this happens through faith, not through good works.

Third, Wesley spoke of "sanctifying grace"—God's ongoing work to transform us into people who love God and neighbors perfectly. John captures this when he writes that Jesus "made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father." We're not just forgiven—we're given new identities and new purposes. As priests, we're called to help others connect with God and to offer our whole lives as worship.

But here's what makes this passage unique: it holds together both present reality and future hope. Wesley taught that God's grace works in us now, and the final transformation will happen when Jesus returns. John's vision of Jesus "coming with the clouds" reminds us that history is moving toward God's ultimate victory over everything that causes suffering and injustice. This ancient text speaks powerfully into our contemporary experiences in ways that might surprise us.

In our culture that is often driven by anxiety, people constantly worry about the future, John's repeated phrase "the one who is and was and is coming" offers profound peace. Whether you're worried about climate change, political chaos, economic uncertainty, or personal health, this passage reminds us that the same God who created the world and sustained it through history is also the God who will bring it to completion. Your future isn't in the hands of politicians or market forces—it's held by the Almighty.

In our social media world where truth often gets twisted for political or financial gain, Jesus as "the faithful witness" becomes crucial. When news sources contradict each other, when politicians make promises they don't keep, when advertisers manipulate us with false claims, we have someone who always tells the truth about what really matters. This doesn't mean Christians have all the answers about complex issues, but it does mean we have a reliable source for understanding God's heart and purposes.

In our world where injustice often seems to win, John's vision of Jesus "coming with the clouds" reminds us that history isn't heading toward chaos—it's moving toward justice. Every act of racism, every abuse of power, every way the vulnerable get exploited will be exposed and corrected when Jesus returns. This gives us courage to work for justice now because we know God's purposes will ultimately prevail.

The good news is that the God who holds all of history in God's hands has chosen to love you completely and make you part of his eternal kingdom.

This passage reveals the heart of the Gospel: God doesn't wait for the world to improve before getting involved. Right now, while everything still feels broken and uncertain, Jesus is actively present among us as the faithful witness, the conqueror of death, and the ruler over every earthly power. Jesus' love for you isn't dependent on your performance, your faith level, or your ability to understand everything about God.

The good news goes even deeper. When John writes that Jesus "freed us from our sins by his blood," he's not just talking about forgiveness—he's describing complete liberation from everything that enslaves us. Fear, guilt, shame, addiction, bitterness, meaninglessness—Jesus' death and resurrection break the power of everything that keeps us from experiencing the life God intends.

And when John declares that Jesus "made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father," he's announcing that your life has cosmic significance. You're not just trying to survive until you die—you're participating in God's work to transform the world. Every act of love, every moment of truth-telling, every effort to serve others connects you to God's ultimate plan to "make all things new."

But perhaps the most amazing good news is John's vision of Jesus "coming with the clouds." This world's brokenness isn't permanent. The suffering, injustice, and death that break our hearts and seem final—none of these have the last word.

This good news can transform how we live today, giving us both comfort in difficulty and purpose in service. Since Jesus has made you part of his kingdom and called you to serve as his priest, I invite you to consider responding in a couple of specific ways.

**Start each day remembering who controls time.** Before checking your phone or thinking about your schedule, remind yourself: "God was here before my problems started, God is with me right now, and God will be here when this is over." Let this truth about the "one who is and was and is coming" shape how you approach uncertainty.

**Practice being a faithful witness in one conversation.** Look for one opportunity this week to tell the truth with love about something that matters. Maybe it's having an honest conversation with your spouse, speaking up about an issue at work, or simply sharing your real feelings instead of pretending everything's fine.

**Live with the confidence that comes from knowing the ending.** When you face situations that feel overwhelming or unfair, remember that Jesus is "coming with the clouds" to make everything right. This doesn't mean being passive—it means working for justice and peace while trusting that God's purposes will ultimately prevail.

These steps help us live as both a beloved child of God and a faithful servant of God's kingdom.

John's greeting in Revelation 1:4-8 establishes the foundation for how followers of Jesus can live with hope in any circumstance. Like Jillian holding her acceptance letter, we need regular reminders that our place in God's kingdom was established by Jesus' love and sacrifice, not our efforts to prove ourselves worthy.

But unlike Jillian's story, this isn't just about past acceptance—it's also about future transformation. Jesus is walking among us now as our faithful witness and loving liberator, and he's coming again to complete the work of making all things new. This truth doesn't just comfort us in difficulty; it empowers us to serve courageously, speak truthfully, and love generously as citizens of God's eternal kingdom.

Will you pray with me?

Alpha and Omega, help us live each day knowing that you hold our past, present, and future. Through Jesus, make us faithful witnesses of your love until he comes again. Amen.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In crafting today's sermon, I employed AI assistants like Claude and Apple Intelligence, yet the ultimate responsibility for its content rests with me. These tools offered valuable perspectives, but the most influential sermon preparation hinges on biblical study, theological insight, personal reflection, and divine guidance. I see AI as a supportive aid to enrich the sermon process while ensuring my own voice in proclaiming the Word of God.