

ST. BARTHOLOMEW’S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Revelation 1:4-8

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ...” (part 2)

REVELATION’S ESSENCE

We continue our series on Revelation chapter 1. The most controversial book in the Bible may be intimidating to some, but it is one of the most important books in Holy Scripture. Why? The first words tell us why – ***“The Revelation of Jesus Christ.”*** It is all about the Lord Jesus Christ. It comes directly from God the Father to God the Son and is conveyed in its entirety through the angel to John who is ***“in the Spirit”*** (Rev. 1:10)! Therefore, it is not a creation of John himself. John is merely the transcriber of this message. But it is not just for John and the people of his time (late 1st century). It is for the entire Church and pertains to what is going on currently in the Gospel Age inaugurated by the Lord Christ and what will happen before, during, and after His Second Coming.

And it will bless us! Note last week that verse 3 tells us that we will be blessed if we not only read and hear the words of Revelation, but if we do them. That means that Revelation is meant to be understood, for you can’t obey something you don’t understand.

Now Satan recognizes the power of Revelation in that it predicts his eventual demise and defeat, and it points the world to the reality of whom Jesus really is and what He has done and why and how He is coming back. So Satan seeks to get people off track in one of two ways when it comes to Revelation – he either gets people so confused and afraid of its contents that they avoid it, or he gets them to obsess over it – over all the details and hypothetical’s that they miss the overarching details of Who Christ is and the significance of what He has done and how such things can change and improve our lives for the better.

REVELATION 1:4-8

So let’s now get back to Revelation chapter 1. We will be looking at verses 4-8 today.

“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, 5and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood— 6and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. 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.”

We have John’s name repeated. He is the messenger of Christ’s message to us. He is most likely John the Apostle as several of the early Church Fathers (leaders of the church in the 2nd and 3rd centuries) wrote that John was in exile on the island of Patmos during the reign of the Emperor Domitian when he received his vision from the Lord. He is to send Christ’s message to seven churches. These were seven specific churches in seven cities in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). They were all connected by an

ancient highway. The first and most important church in the region was the church in Ephesus. It is the first church addressed in Revelation (2:1-6) and would be the first recipient of the message. If you look at a map and the order of the churches addressed in Revelation 2-3, you will see that the order of churches corresponds to a clockwise journey from Ephesus to Laodicea. Why seven churches? “Seven” is the number of completion in the Bible. God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh. God reveals his message of Revelation to John in a series of sevens. Thus, the “seven churches” really signify two things – it is a complete message and it is meant for the entire Church of Jesus Christ.

A GREETING FROM THE TRIUNE GOD

We are given a standard salutation (message of greeting) found in many of the New Testament epistles – grace and peace. Grace only comes from God. It is God’s goodness and favor towards us. We can’t earn grace and we don’t deserve grace. Such grace is fully expressed in the Person of Jesus Christ and specifically by His death on the cross. Paul writes that it is by grace that we have been saved through faith (**Eph. 2:8**). Peace can only come from knowing the prince of peace. We must be first reconciled to God before we can have peace with Him.

But ultimately God’s grace and peace come from the full work of the Trinity. And we see this in Revelation’s salutation. First, we read, **“from Him who is and who was and who is to come”** – i.e. the Father. God can’t be named. He is outside of time. He is ultimate reality.

Then we read, **“From the seven spirits...”** Who are the seven spirits? Some may think angels but looking at the context it is clear that it is a reference to the Holy Spirit. Again if seven is the number of completion, this suggests a wholeness to the subject being stated. Moreover, we always need to keep in mind when we seek to interpret Scripture that Scripture interprets Scripture. In other words, we can understand the full meaning of a passage when we look at other passages with the same terms or subject matter used. So we see that the phrase “seven spirits” is used again in **Rev. 3:1**, **“He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars.”** We know from **Rev.1:20** that the seven stars represent the angels for each of the seven churches. So the “spirits” can’t be angels. In addition, for each of *the seven* churches there is at the end of the message **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”**

Then in **Rev. 4:5b**: ***And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God;*** The “seven spirits” are further identified in **Rev. 5:6**, **“And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.”**

Both the imagery of torches and eyes signify the omnipresence and omniscience of the Holy Spirit.

It should also be noted that in our first lesson from **Isaiah 11:1-11** we hear how the Messiah will be empowered by the sevenfold manifestation of the Spirit. Finally, there is no reason to expect that the “grace and peace” greeting from God the Father and God the Son (see below) would include an angelic greeting in the middle of the Godhead! Thus, the “seven spirits” must refer to the Holy Spirit.

THE MAIN SUBJECT OF REVELATION – JESUS CHRIST!

Now the attention turns to God the Son - notice how much is said concerning Jesus. He is described by three titles – *“the faithful witness,” “the firstborn from the dead,”* and *“the ruler of the kings of the earth.”* Each title reflects an aspect of His character, and all three highlight Christ’s deity as God in the flesh.

1) *Faithful witness* – Christ is totally trustworthy in that He is always faithful. Why did Jesus come to earth? He told Pontius Pilate in **John 18** – *“to testify to the truth.”* In other words, to bear witness of who He is and what He represents. And His witness is till death. He was willing to be faithful till death.

We are called to be about the same, aren’t we? The apostle Paul wrote *it is required of stewards that one be found faithful.* Jesus said in **Lk. 18:8**, *“When the Son of Man returns will He find faith on the earth?” Are we being faithful?* What do we want to hear at the end of our lives? *Well done, thou good and faithful servant.*

2) *Firstborn from the dead* – “firstborn” means to have “preeminence” “first place.” Jesus was faithful to death and did die, but He is the only one who rose from the dead by virtue of His own power. He was the only one who rose in a transformed, resurrected body. Lazarus rose from the dead but he would die again. So too with others who have come back from the dead. There is only one, however, who rose from the grave to live forever and not die again – the Lord Jesus Christ. Every other religious leader is dead, buried, and gone. Not Jesus. As such He has authority over life and death.

3) *Ruler of the kings of the earth* – when Pontius Pilate remarked so you are a king? Jesus said Yes, I am a king but my kingdom is not of this world, if it were so, my followers would be taking it by force. And then Jesus said, you would have no authority unless it had been granted you from above. In essence Jesus is above every rule and authority in heaven and earth. All earthly kingdoms will end and all kings will be brought before the Lord for judgment – see Psalm 2! They may rebel at the end of the age but they will be crushed. The Kingdom of God is the only Kingdom that is eternal, and it is the only Kingdom that matters; and Jesus is the King of the Kingdom of God!

CHRIST’S LOVING ACTION AND OUR RESPONSE

Not only is Jesus described to us with three important titles that reflect His divine nature, but we are given three aspects of what He is about as our Lord. First, *He loves us!* Don’t think for a moment the message of Revelation is not about God’s love. That is the first thing said about Christ in relationship to us. He loves us! Everything is done out of God’s love. Even judgment of the wicked reflects God’s love – for a just and loving judge can’t let evil go unpunished. Remember Pharaoh and the Egyptians? They mercilessly abused and oppressed the Hebrews, the people of Israel. God told them to let His people go. Do the right thing, Pharaoh. But he refused. Plague after plague was sent but they still refused. Finally, God sent the angel of death to kill all the firstborn of Egypt and Pharaoh relented. But not completely. He changed his mind and still went after Moses and the people of God. It is because of the hardness of man’s heart that God’s judgment comes. And God’s love cannot tolerate the abuse of His world or other people by man. For the self-centered, sinful nature of man always results in such wickedness. It will not go unpunished. How much more for those who spurn the blood of Christ!

For the love of Christ is most visibly demonstrated in His death on the cross. We hear the words, ***“Who released us from our sins by His blood.”*** Christ’s death is central to the Gospel. At the core of Revelation is the fact that Christ is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He is the innocent righteous victim that no animal or human being could be. As we hear in **John 3:16** and **Romans 5:8**. God the Father loved us so much to give His only Son and the Son loved us so much to give His only life, all so that we would be released (forgiven of our sins) from the guilt of our transgression and free to serve and worship God the way we were supposed to. God remedied the problem that free will causes. He took care of our propensity to do wrong by addressing the sin problem legally and effectually.

Once our sin problem is dealt with, we then can be the people God calls us to be - ***He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father.*** So God loves us, He shows that love in Christ who pays our penalty of sin so that we can live for him as His priests to the world around us.

What does that mean for you and me? It means once we come to know Christ and are born again, it should not just make a difference in our lives but our lives should be changed to make a difference! How are you being a difference maker in your life? The only way you will be able to do so is to have an available, willing and humble heart. One that reflects the words, “not my ways, Lord, but yours” “not my will, but yours.” When we have such a heart, it is then that God will give you the direction you need and the strength to do it. How so? Through His Holy Spirit!

The salutation ends with giving all glory and dominion to Christ – ***“to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen!”*** Isn’t it interesting that in the Lord’s prayer Christ ends with the words for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory concerning His Father, but now we have the same thing said of the Son!

But Christ’s work is not done – He is coming in the clouds. Jesus said He would return in the clouds; so too did the angels after Jesus ascended into heaven, and so did the Spirit predict through the prophet Daniel (**Dan. 7:13**). ***Every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him*** (the Jews (**Zech. 12:10**) and Gentiles). Finally, Jesus says the same thing that is true of His Father - ***I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”***

The alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. So it is like Jesus is saying I am the A and the Z of the English alphabet. We have seen Christ’s omnipotence in His power over death and all authority. We have seen His omnipresence – every eye shall see Him. But now we see His omniscience. He is the all-knowing One. Think about that for a moment - all knowledge! How do we construct our ideas and plans and communicate information? Through words. Jesus is the complete alphabet. All knowledge and information that is already discovered by man is nothing new but that which already is and already known by God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit! But which of the Godhead is actually coming to earth? Jesus Christ! Whose birth do we celebrate at Christmas? Jesus Christ’s! Whose resurrection do we celebrate at Easter? Jesus Christ’s! Whose return do we celebrate at Advent? Jesus Christ’s! For He is truly LORD of heaven and earth! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!