

A Letter Like No Other

Text: Revelation 1.4–8

Theme: A sovereign God gave His Son to redeem us and bring us home

Introduction – My own letter from God

- wasn't inspired Scripture, although it was saturated with Bible references
- it wasn't a prophecy, in the sense of telling any future realities
- it may have come close to one, in the sense of strengthening me & Ann
- I was in a dark time of ministry, lots of questions and struggles
- when asked what it might take to convince me otherwise, flippantly said, "A letter from God"
- and He delivered!
- it brought much light and strength in a very difficult time

John's letter

- is inspired Scripture: God breathed it out
- the Holy Spirit moved John through the writing of every word of this letter
- it is a prophecy of fore-telling & forth-telling
- God gave him insight into what will happen
- He also had His Spirit carry John along to write to believers of all ages and times
- it is a letter like no other

Seven churches

- we'll study each portion to each church after the first of the year
- but know that these were prominent cities in Asia
- beginning with Ephesus, they were on a circular pattern of sorts
- it would have been easy to begin there and make the circuit with John's letter
- but why just seven? Surely more than just seven churches in Asia by now
- indeed there were, but one, these were most prominent & strategic cities
- but second, number seven is also symbolic
- seven is number of fulfillment, completion, even perfection
- so these churches represent all churches of all eras, even us today
- what they faced & endured, all churches have and are going through even up to today
- so, they needed a letter from God, a letter like no other

Grace & peace

- we know it's a letter by the very opening portions, here in vv. 4–8
- "John to the seven churches in Asia:"
- grace and peace: what more appropriate greeting & blessing to these churches
- they all lived in troublesome times, facing threats on all fronts
- Rome was beginning a streak of persecutions in which many Christians gave their lives
- several of them also had enemies on the inside as well
- with heretics, false teachers, and immoral promoters in seemingly every pew
- grace and peace were much needed

See the content summarized in this greeting

- Revelation is such an amazing letter, prophecy, unveiling
- and right from the very beginning, tells us such great news
- we're told that a sovereign God gave His Son to redeem us and bring us home
- let's look at this, shall we?

First, we see...

I. AN EVER-PRESENT HELP IN TIME OF TROUBLE

- the church of Jesus Christ has experienced some times of ease and peace

- but it wouldn't happen for another 240 years
- what they all needed was to know God was with them
- and this is what they are given

1. Sovereign God

- **“from Him who is, and was, and is to come”**
- God the Father is the one to whom John refers here
- and he begins by reminding his readers of the eternal God without beginning nor end
- this is the God who made Himself know to Moses as “I AM who I AM” in Exodus 3.14
- He had no beginning, the Self-existent One who brought all things into being
- He is the everlasting God

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

(Psalm 90:2 ESV)

Are you not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One?

(Habakkuk 1:12 ESV)

- this is a God worthy of all praise, honor and worship
- in His infinite sovereignty, He has always been, always will be faithful to covenant promises

Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am he.

fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Behold, all who are incensed against you shall be put to shame and confounded; those who strive against you shall be as nothing and shall perish.

(Isaiah 41:4, 10–12, 15 ESV)

- would this have not lifted the hearts of all God's children in those seven churches?
- they would praise Him forever and ever
- and that's what this letter does: bring on great praise to God the Father
- but also to the Spirit and the Son

2. Ever-present Spirit

- **“and from the seven spirits who are before his throne”**
- some have wondered if a reference to angels, since Holy Spirit not specifically referenced
- but angels never have “grace and peace” coming from them
- plus, they are never to be worshipped
- no, this is a reference to the perfect, full and complete Spirit of God
- it's part of this Revelation waltz mentioned last week
- Father, Son, and Spirit, one, two, three, one, two, three, remember
- He is always before the throne of God carrying out the Father's will perfectly in His saints
- the seven churches needed this reminder, blessing, and encouragement
- so, they worship God the Father, God the Spirit, and now for the Son...

3. Reigning Savior

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 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

(Revelation 1:5–6 ESV)

- note this threefold description of our Lord and Savior

1) faithful witness

- Jesus is THE example to all who would bear witness to Him
- the word used for witness & testimony is same as our word martyr

- a martyr is a witness, bearing testimony to the one from whom he dies
- and Jesus was indeed this
- only thing that can come from Him is faithfulness
- witnessed to who God is! If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father
- can't find a faithful witness elsewhere among men
- Adam? Nope, she ate, I ate
- Noah? Nope; yes, built the ark, but then he got out of the boat
- Abraham? Nope; Hagar, problems with lying about Sarah
- David? Nope; even though man after God's own heart, Bathsheba
- Samson? Oops! Don't need to go there, do I?
- where do we go for a faithful witness?
- Romans 3.23: all have sinned; there is but One faithful witness
- worthy of worship because He is God

2) firstborn of the dead

- last I checked, death rate on earth is one/person
- there is only One who answers the question: What about death?
- preeminent over death, victorious over death, conqueror over death
- He is the only way we get to the other side into heaven
- Lazarus? #1 – his resurrection was different; #2 – he died again
- Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die, says old folk song
- Death: never a good thing; but it is the only way in Christ
- Jesus will never die again; victorious over death, hell, and the grave
- this is also how Daniel 12.2 gets fulfilled

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

(Daniel 12:2 ESV)

- He arose with all power in His hands, preeminent
- worthy of our worship because of this

3) ruler of kings on earth

- King of kings and Lord of lords
- no matter how high a man rises on earth, never rise to level of Christ
- Handel's Messiah, The Hallelujah Chorus, we all stand up
- king was present at performance; some mistakenly say because he was bored
- no, caught up in it and needed to stand to honor the glorified Christ
- when king stands up, everybody stands up
- there was a king higher than him: King Jesus
- Jesus is preeminent, eminently worthy of all our praise, adoration, and worship

But that's not enough; no, there is more seen in this letter like no other, for now we see...

II. AN ALL-GLORIOUS LORD

- the clear reference to the Trinity in vv. 4–6 would have been great encouragement
- the troubles, trials, and tribulation they were enduring needing this word
- Jesus: He suffered like them, and more, thus bore witness to God's glory
- His resurrection brought the promise of hope in rising again from the dead
- and with emperors like Rome had, they needed to know Jesus was over them
- but God gives John even more for which we praise the name of Jesus
- we've seen WHO He is; now let's hear WHAT He has done

1. He loves us

- it would be right of God to force us to worship because of who He is
- but He doesn't do that, because He loves us! Me!
- we worship, not because we have to, but because we get to: He loves us, you, me

- my grandkids love me...because I bring them donuts
- my kids love me...because I'm their father
- my wife loves me...because she choose me over all others
- My Jesus loves me, very God of very God, spoke world into existence
- He sees me more clearly than anyone or anything else; knows all my stuff
- And He loves me; not sentimental love
- it is a powerful, never-ceasing, never-weakening love
- and it can be yours: look to Christ, who loved you enough to die for you
- and how has He loved you?

2. freed us from our sins by His blood

- Doubt God's love? Jesus' love for you? Problem: looking at you
- need to look at cross, not you
- I just don't feel like He loves me...look at the cross and say that again...NOT!
- When I survey the wondrous cross on which the king of glory died...
- No more room to debate whether He loves you or not
- When we were still sinners, Christ died for us!
- How do I know Christ loves me? The cross! The Cross! The CROSS!
- His blood paid the penalty I owed to God for my sin
- those who sin deserve to die: that's you, that's me, that's everybody
- but Jesus died that death so that His people could be reconciled to God and live
- He died in your place as your substitute
- He atoned for your sins
- and this freed us from our slavery
- heard a testimony earlier this week about a man who had hated God
- cruel father, terrible person, children prayed earnestly that God would change him
- and when God took hold of him, man said: I heard, I felt the chains literally fall off me
- praise God, this is our Jesus, who frees us from our sins by His blood
- and as if that still weren't enough for which to praise Him
- John gives us the third step in our Revelation waltz

3. He reigns

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

(1 Peter 2:4-8 ESV)

- Western Wall in Jerusalem, Fortress of Antonia, Jesus walked that path
- He was being led to Golgotha, led to be tortured
- Huge stones, laid the foundation of temple mount; size of small houses
- just before Fortress of Antonia, one stone out of place
- stone that the builders rejected; Jesus went past this stone
- He is that stone: have you rejected Him? Or are you a living stone in Christ
- built into a spiritual house
- as priests, we're not worthy to offer worship Jesus deserves & demands
- people of unclean lips, whatever we offer is insufficient
- if outside of Christ: nothing you can offer that is acceptable
- only thing: your sin and repentance of them
- go into foreign country, exchange your currency because won't spend there

- it is worthless
- Jesus is God, worship Him, but can't because you're not acceptable
- Okay, I will; but no, you won't because you don't have it in you
- Only one way to be acceptable, made worthy
- You have to be made worthy: He loved us & set us free by His blood
- Christ died for sins once for all
- once made worthy, we can now offer acceptable sacrifices
- priests unto His God and Father
- oh, let us all praise our soon and coming King

4. coming with the clouds

- if you don't think there's reason to be reconciled to God, then hear these words
- there is an urgency almost hidden here: He's coming...and you don't know when
- but when He comes, you'll know it
- it won't be a secret, He will be seen, coming just as He ascended so long ago: in the clouds
- every eye will see Him: ever single man, woman, child on earth will see His return

“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.

(Zechariah 12:10 ESV)

- no matter what the church has suffered in the Tribulation, He will come for them
- but not just for them: those who pierced Him
- and not just those literally physically present, but all who have pierced Him by rejecting Him
- this is a summons, a large “Pay Attention” sign over the whole earth
- history and life now will not go on in this darkness: He will come
- His lordship, now confessed by all who are His by faith, inescapably evident to the world

Conclusion – Jesus is God and Lord

- God gave His Son to redeem us and bring us home
- He ought to be praised continually for all eternity
- and to this John wrote: Even so! Amen!
- So shall it be! May it be so!
- this affirms the rightness of God's decisions

And then we are given one last piece of praise to close with:

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

(Revelation 1:8 ESV)

God reveals Himself so that those who know Him are blessed and praise Him regardless of circumstances

- let us worship our great King and Lord, Jesus Christ