

# GRACE AND PEACE TO YOU

Revelation 1:4-8

## Introduction

It is amazing how many people know the hymn “Amazing Grace”; it is sad how few people experience God’s grace. John’s hope and longing was that the persecuted churches to whom he wrote would deeply experience God’s grace and peace in the midst of their trials.

## Greeting to the Seven Churches (1:4-8)

### Revelation 1:4–8 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> 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, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

As we look at verse 4, who is the Apostle John greeting? Who are the seven churches in Asia? Hold your place in Revelation 1 and turn to the maps in the back of your Bible. Many Bibles have a map marked “The Missionary Journeys of Paul”. Find “Asia” and then find “Ephesus”. Moving upward in a counter clockwise manner in a rough circle starting with Ephesus, find Smyrna, then Pergamum, then Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (1:11). Though there were other churches in Asia these seven represented the characteristics of and challenges faced by all the churches; to these seven Revelation was written.

John’s greeting includes what is called an *invocation*; a call for God’s grace and peace to rest on each of these seven congregations. Each member of the Trinity is mentioned.

The One *who is and who was and who is to come* is God the Father.

The *seven spirits who are before his throne* is the Holy Spirit. This is an allusion to Isaiah 11:2 which describes the seven attributes of the Holy Spirit Who will rest upon the Messiah when He reigns upon the earth.

### Isaiah 11:2 (ESV)

<sup>2</sup> And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

You might want to write Isaiah 11:2 in the margin next to Revelation 1:4 to help you remember why the Holy Spirit is described as the *seven spirits*. You will see Him referred to in this manner several more times in Revelation.

Jesus is mentioned as the final source of grace and peace.

<sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

## Jesus, the Faithful Witness

In what three ways does John refer to Jesus?

He is the *faithful witness*.

*Jesus is the faithful witness.*

What does this mean?

What is a witness? A witness is someone who gives evidence of something they have seen or heard. In His first coming, Jesus came to give evidence of God and God’s truth. Jesus made it clear that His teaching came from God the Father (John 7:16-17, 8:28, 12:49).

### John 12:49 (ESV)

<sup>49</sup> For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak.

Jesus was faithful to communicate exactly what God commanded Him to say and speak; in this, He was the *faithful witness*.

If you want to know God and what is true; Jesus is the *faithful witness*. He will be a *faithful witness* to you about Who God is and what God wants for your life and how you can have a restored relationship with your Creator. Jesus will not steer you wrong; He will lead you into all truth.

### **Jesus, the Firstborn of the Dead**

What was the next way in which John referred to Jesus?

He is the *firstborn of the dead*.

*Jesus is the firstborn of the dead.*

A dead Jesus is a discredited Jesus. A dead Jesus is a sinner Jesus suffering the wage of sin which is death (Rom. 6:23). A dead Jesus is no help, no hope for guilty sinners like us. As the Apostle Paul reasoned:

#### **1 Corinthians 15:14–19 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. <sup>15</sup> We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then you and I are dead, separated from God, because our sin remains.

But praise be to God, Jesus is the *firstborn of the dead*. This means He died, but came back to life. Why did He die in the first place? To pay the penalty for your sin and mine.

#### **1 Corinthians 15:3–6 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

Jesus never sinned so never became guilty of sin and never earned the death penalty. In obedience to the Father's plan, Jesus willingly became our substitute, stepped into our place and suffered our punishment when He was crucified. Here's how the Apostle Peter explains it:

#### **1 Peter 2:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

You may recall that just before He died, Jesus cried, "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30). That was a phrase used in the first century when a debt was paid in full. The Apostle Paul explains what was happening in the spiritual realm.

#### **Colossians 2:13–14 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, <sup>14</sup> by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

The long record of my sins, my debt against God - past, present and future - were nailed to the cross, soaked in the holy blood of Jesus, paid in full. And the proof that God accepted Jesus' payment on our behalf is His resurrection from the dead.

How can you be sure that your sins have been paid for by Jesus?

By relying upon the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus to make you right with God. To the Jewish scholar Nicodemus, Jesus explained:

**John 3:16–18 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

If you’ve been thinking that by being a better person, by coming church, by trying harder to be good you can make yourself acceptable to God, you’re mistaken. Your sin still separates. Only when your sin is forgiven can your life with God begin. And the forgiveness of your sin is offered as a gift.

**Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

This is where God’s grace and peace begins in your life; by accepting the gift of Jesus dying in your place on the cross paying the penalty of your sins, being buried and rising again. You cannot add anything to Jesus’ perfect payment; your baptism adds nothing, your good works add nothing. You need to rely on Jesus alone and what He has done for you to make you right with God. This is what it means to be saved through faith – it means you are putting your full confidence in the sacrifice of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins.

This is God’s grace and peace; trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior and enter in!

Jesus is the ***firstborn*** of the dead.

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If He is the ***firstborn*** that means what? There are more to follow! Next to be resurrected is the Church, at the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Then, all the Old Testament saints such as Abraham and Moses etc., in the interval between the end of the Tribulation and the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom (Isaiah 26:19; Ezek. 37:12-14; Dan. 12:2, 11-12). So also, the Tribulation saints killed in the course of the Tribulation will be resurrected in the interval between the end of the Tribulation and the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:4).

This order of resurrections is called *the first resurrection*.

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You want to be part of *the first resurrection* because there is a second resurrection and it is a resurrection to judgment and punishment that ends in the second death.

**Revelation 20:5–6 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. <sup>6</sup> Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

As you can see, *the first resurrection* is not one event, it is a resurrection that comes in stages. This is what the Apostle Paul was describing in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23.

**1 Corinthians 15:20–23 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

What is the order of *the first resurrection*?

**The First Resurrection (Rev. 20:5-6)**

1. Jesus
2. The Church (1 Thess. 4:13-18) prior to the Tribulation
3. Two Witnesses (Rev. 11:11) during Tribulation

4. O.T. Saints (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2, 11-12) after Tribulation

5. Tribulation Saints (Rev. 20:4) after Tribulation

Jesus is *the faithful witness*.

Jesus is *the firstborn of the dead*.

### **Jesus, the Ruler of Kings on Earth**

What is the third description of Jesus in verse 5?

#### **Revelation 1:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

Jesus is *the ruler of kings on earth*.

*Jesus is the ruler of kings on earth.*

Is this meant figuratively; has Jesus been reigning over the kings of the earth for the past 2000 years? No. This is not meant figuratively, but literally. Whereas the first two descriptions of Jesus as the faithful witness and firstborn of the dead were fulfilled in His first coming, His ruling over the kings on the earth will be fulfilled in His second coming. When He comes to the earth at the end of the Tribulation Jesus will establish His kingdom here on earth and fulfill not only the prophecies of Revelation, but many O.T. prophecies of the Messiah reigning here on earth.

The Prophet Isaiah wrote:

#### **Isaiah 9:6-7 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

The Prophet Jeremiah wrote:

#### **Jeremiah 23:5-6 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. <sup>6</sup> In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

The Prophet Zechariah wrote:

#### **Zechariah 9:9-10 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. <sup>10</sup> I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Just as verse nine was literally fulfilled at the Triumphal Entry (Matt. 21:1-11) so also verse ten will be literally fulfilled when our Lord establishes His kingdom here on earth and reigns over the kings of the earth during the Millennial Kingdom.

What will that be like?

It will be wonderful beyond our imagination.

It will be grace and peace.

And it is Jesus Who makes it possible. Well did John break out in praise to Jesus in verses 5b-6:

**Doxology (1:5b-6)**

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood <sup>6</sup> and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

**Theme of Revelation (1:7)**

As we studied previously, verse 7 is the theme of Revelation; the 2nd coming of Jesus to the earth.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

And in what seems like a divine stamp of approval upon his greeting to the churches, God declares:

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

**Conclusion**

We have learned many wonderful things this morning, but as Dr. Walvoord points out, the first eight verses of Revelation are all about Jesus.

*Jesus Christ is the central figure of the opening eight verses of Revelation. As the Source of revelation He is presented in verse 1. As the Channel of the word and testimony of God He is cited in verse 2. His blessings through His revealed word are promised in verse 3. In verse 5 He is the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. He is revealed to be the source of all grace who loves us and cleanses us from our sins through His shed blood. He is the source of our royal priesthood who has the right to gather in Himself all glory and dominion forever. He is promised to come with clouds, attended with great display of power and glory, and every eye shall see the One who died for men. He is the Almighty One of eternity past and eternity future. If no more had been written than that contained in this introductory portion of chapter 1, it would have constituted a tremendous restatement of the person and work of Christ such as found in no comparable section of Scripture.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Galaxie Software, 2008), 40.