

A Glorious Salutation

Call to Worship: Psalm 89:1-29

Hymn #1 (supp)- *All Creatures of Our God and King*

1st Scripture: 1 Peter 2:1-12

Hymn #216- *Crown Him with Many Crowns*

2nd Scripture: Revelation 1:4&5a

Hymn #580- *When Peace Like a River*

Introduction:

The wonderful news of Christ and His glorious salvation paves its way into your heart, freeing you from the power and penalty of your sin, as you embrace Him by faith...and life takes on a whole new meaning. You have been born again unto a new and living hope; you have been reconciled and introduced to your Almighty Creator for the first time; you have fellowship with Christ and His people and you are heading for glory! The joy is unspeakable and overwhelming and it seems as if nothing can shake this joy. All that separates you from the completion of this salvation is the life that sits in front of you, where you are called to grow in Christ and to bring Him glory by means of your own testimony in grace. Seems simple enough...until the trials and afflictions come. Yes, they are meant to improve upon your faith, and to sanctify you further in the direction of Christ-likeness, but going through them is often very, very difficult. Along the way, the validity of your faith in an invisible God will be greatly tested; you will see some of the dark and wretched formerly unrecognized corners of your naturally sinful heart, and you will be rejected by the world at large. Your new found faith in this invisible Christ will, at times, get you into trouble in the visible world that surrounds you (maybe even a heap of trouble).

Christianity will change your life forever, but on this side of the grave, that change will often go unappreciated from the standpoint of the world. The world will work against you. If it doesn't persecute you or even kill you in some way, it will hate you and seek to bring you to compromise your faith, leaving you ineffective in your Christian witness. For, the world is under the power and influence of satan and a host of demonic beings, who are set upon destroying the Kingdom of Christ or at least crippling it in any way possible. Ancient spiritual beings are set upon destroying you because they hate God and His Christ. And they make good use of the world (its governmental powers to threaten and persecute and even kill, its false religious

influences to confuse and cast doubt upon the truth, and its seductive materialistic sway to draw you away into all manner of idolatry and lustfulness).

The apostle John is writing to the seven churches of Asia; seven churches who represent all of the churches that exist in every age; to exhort, to warn, to rebuke and to encourage, in light of these realities. Even as he writes, many have already compromised in significant ways, such that they will be sapped of their spiritual life and witness altogether if they do not repent. Others (few) are standing firm and must be encouraged to continue onward, in the face of further coming temptations to compromise and even intensified persecution. Their financial stability may soon be cut off because of their faith in Christ. Their social status may soon be cut off because of their faith in Christ. Their very lives may soon be cut off because of their faith in Christ. And so, something far greater; something unseen and yet real and true; something worth far more than all of these things, must be disclosed to them, if they are to persevere in the short term that they might make it to glory and come into the blessing of eternal life in a world where tears, sorrows, pains and death are no more. John is to carry his audience beneath the surface of *visible* promises and threats, so that they might respond to what is *unseen* (but absolutely true), contrary to the urgings of their flesh. He is given this Revelation from God, mediated through Jesus, the victorious Lamb of God and the conquering Lion of Judah, to serve this great and glorious purpose.

And so, as he prepares to disclose the visions that he has received on the Isle of Patmos, he begins first by bringing them a powerful and effective salutation on behalf of their Triune God and Creator! Yes, the world has spoken and ever will speak, loudly and visibly unto the end of this age, but the sovereign, almighty, omnipotent voice of God speaks as well, and this simple and yet profound reality saturates the body of this salutation, which opens this apocalyptic letter.

“John, to the seven churches which 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, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth.”

You see, it is so easy, brethren, to read this salutation, as if it were simply a grouping of nice and pleasant words that serve no other purpose than to open a letter, leading us into the real

important stuff. After all, when we write letters, salutations are generally standard and respectful, but we look for nothing significant in them. We pass through them with hardly a second thought, because we see them as more procedural and in line with the proper format for opening a letter. But this is by far *not* the case here. Salutations in Scripture are meant to be pondered. They are meant to speak to us and to prepare us for everything else we will read in the letter. They are meant to bring us face to face with the living God, so that we might be ready to hear all that He has to say with a sense of sobriety, humility, awe and joy.

In fact, this particular salutation is so weighty, sobering and comforting, that I want to commit this entire sermon to opening it up. It has much to say to us as we prepare to work through the body of this Book. In some ways, you might even say that the weight of every encouragement, warning, rebuke and exhortation given in this Book is found right here. And so, let us break this down a bit by considering first the main “delivering” Subject (or origin) of this salutation and then some of the details given within it, concerning this main Subject, followed by the actual salutation given itself.

I. The main “delivering” Subject (or origin) of this salutation

Who is the main “delivering” Subject of this greeting and salutation? Well, certainly we see in verse four that John is the one who is delivering the actual message, but we also recognize that he is doing so on behalf of another. John is delivering a message that belongs to someone else. And in the second part of verse four, we find the main “delivering” Subject; the originator and Author of the actual message itself.

“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, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth.**”

Clearly, we see that there are three “froms” written in this statement, indicating that three Persons sit at the root of this salutation. And without having to delve into any manner of deep investigation for the moment, we recognize that these three Persons are the Persons who make up the God Head. And so, John is offering a greeting; a greeting with a glorious blessing attached,

to be sure, on behalf of God the Father, the Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, without examining the descriptions given of each Person (for the moment), at the least, we can immediately say that this salutation, in and of itself, ought to carry infinite weight, simply by virtue of its Author. You know, when you get a letter in the mail, and it is genuinely, knowingly and consciously sent on behalf of the President of the United States of America (to his knowledge), that adds a certain weight to the content of that letter, which doesn't generally come with a letter sent to you by Cousin Joe or Aunt Beth. You save a letter sent to you by the President, and you read it over and over again, especially knowing that he himself has consciously taken the time to convey it with an expressed significant purpose. Well, when God speaks; when the Creator of heaven and earth and all things, steps into the visible realm in a very vocal way, and when He sends a message to a minority of dust particles in a rather large sand box, that, in and of itself, ought to cause our hearts to glow and our ears to perk up straight, having the genuine desire to listen carefully to all our God has to say to us. Here, the apostle John sends blessing and greeting on behalf of God Himself, who is the main "delivering" Subject of this salutation.

II. Some of the details given within the salutation, concerning this main Subject

It is interesting to note that when John offers this salutation on behalf of each Person of the Trinity *individually*, he also adds some very significant details, which are used to describe each Person. As is the case with all of Scripture, this is not John being creative, but rather, God is disclosing a message about Himself (in each of His Persons) that is meant to speak in such a way that the readers will carry these truths about their *invisible* God with them as this letter is read, and throughout the duration of time they live in this *visible* world. In other words, what is stated here is meant to speak directly to their *present* and *future* circumstances, whatever they might be. Every mode of opposition that comes against the church, be it the threat of physical persecution or temptations to compromise in a world that is certainly unfavorable toward Christ and His glorious Kingdom, is meant to be seen in the far brighter Light of the God who is unseen and full of eternal glory! Let us consider each description here given to each member of the God Head, before considering the content and intended purpose of the general salutation.

1) “Grace to you and peace *from Him who is and who was and who is to come...*”

Here, the Father is introduced as the Great “I Am,” who introduced Himself to Moses at the burning bush in like fashion. And in that context, God (YHWH) would deliver His people Israel from out of the Egyptian bondage with an outstretched arm. Looking back, the readers would be reminded of the all sovereign power of this God; the One who defeated the mighty and great nation of Egypt with miraculous plagues, ultimately burying the entire Egyptian army under the waves of the Red Sea; that Sea that was divided unto the salvation of His people and brought back together as a vehicle of destruction for the Egyptians. Such thoughts would have been reinforced throughout the Book of Revelation as many of the symbolic judgments described in the Book are spoken of as a reflection of the Exodus plagues.

And ultimately, when God is spoken of as the One “who is and who was and who is to come,” we are meant to ponder the fact that this God who speaks, unlike every foe that we will face in this lifetime, is eternal and infinite! God is the great omnipotent power who precedes all ages, and who sovereignly rules over and through all ages, and who will continue to rule forever and ever into eternity. It kind of puts things in proper perspective doesn't it, brethren? How big are your problems? How big are your enemies? How powerful are your persecutors? How strong is the temptation to compromise and to join forces with the world? Well, here we are approached by the One who is and who was and who is to come! Our God and Father may be unseen, but He rules supreme and remains unchangeable through every age, and whatever *seems to be in the present*, must always be viewed from this standpoint. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome and every other nation that has come to power at some point in this brief, “blink of an eye” history, have all proven to be but dust on the scales (ultimately weightless), when considered in the light of the greatness of our God! They have come and gone. And every kingdom; and every material and influential power in this world will ultimately collapse before the Great and Self-existent, “I Am!” He holds the breath of all of these things in His hand, and He displaces them when He wills with but a word spoken. God the Father is put forward as representing the Triune deity in this way. And we are meant to contemplate His reality in this way, so that we can apply a proper and realistic stature to those things which stand before us *visibly* in the present! What *seems to be* must be seen in the light of what *really is*.

2) “and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne...”

Here we are given a description of the Holy Spirit of God, emphasizing the attributes of His absolute and complete omniscience. It is not to say that there are literally “seven” Spirits, but that, contrary to the world which assumes it has all wisdom, power and control, it is God who has all wisdom, and an understanding of all things, using even the wiles of man as a means of serving His own good and wise purposes. Hendriksen puts it well when he states, “The expression ‘the seven Spirits’ refers to the Holy Spirit in the fullness of His operations and influences in the world and in the church.”

The Holy Spirit mediates all power and grace (on behalf of Christ) to the church, enabling her to persevere, to endure and to overcome. The Holy Spirit conducts the pre-ordained will of God in time and space, operating with all divine power, accomplishing all His Holy will, and nothing can stop Him. He quickens, awakens and regenerates the spiritually dead unto eternal life, so that all of God’s elect meet their salvation, which has been determined in Christ before the world was even created. He convicts, motivates, exhorts, rebukes and encourages by means of the Word of God, empowering His people in such a way that their faith will overcome the world and every form of visible and invisible opposition.

When, what *seems to be*; when that which is seen by the naked eye and is processed through the physical senses *seems* to contradict the will, purpose and promises of God, we trust that the all wise Holy Spirit of God holds the secret to that *which really is*, and in due time, it will all come together and we will find God to be true and every man a liar.

And the Seven-fold Spirit of God (Isa. 11:2) is before the very throne of the Father; a throne, that unlike any throne built in this material world, is a throne that sits supremely upon the very universe and upon the highest seat of authority in the heaven of heavens itself...the Holy Spirit is before this throne, as the lampstand stood before the Most Holy Place in the temple (see Rev. 4:5), constantly ready to discharge the will of God on behalf of His church. And again, this ought to be very comforting and encouraging to a people who are facing all manner of *visible* opposition.

3) “and from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn from the dead, and the Ruler over the kings of the earth.”

And finally, we are given a glorious description of the Lord Jesus Christ, specifically with reference to His earthly accomplishments, and His ascension to the highest position of authority as the God-Man, obtained by means of His accomplishments. And He is here especially displayed in three ways that ought to bring great encouragement to the churches, leading them to give careful heed to the content of this letter.

a- First, He is described as “the Faithful Witness.”

If the churches are going to find the proper motivation for enduring the many attacks that come upon them, they must constantly set Christ before their eyes as “the Faithful Witness.” For it was for the glory and joy that was set before Him that He was able to endure His own suffering, namely the cross, “despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). Hebrews chapter eleven reminds us of the “great cloud” of Old Covenant witnesses who surround us, having borne their own suffering for Christ, and having long since finished the race, obtaining the prize in glory. They surround us, but we are to fix our eyes continually on the Lord Jesus Christ, the “Faithful Witness” par excellence, and the Author and Finisher/Perfector of our faith. We are to “consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest [we] become weary and discouraged in our souls” (Heb. 12:3). And so, we have ever before us, one of the Persons of this salutation, who has Himself conquered by means of His suffering and death; one who has remained faithful to the very end, wholly submissive to the will of the Father; the “Faithful Witness!” If we lose sight of Him, our sufferings and trials and our temptations to compromise will overwhelm us and we will grow weary. And that is why He is set before us in this way at the opening of this letter.

b- But secondly, He is described not only as the “Faithful Witness,” but also as the “Firstborn from the dead.”

And here, we are moved beyond His faithful witness and into the very encouraging outcome of this witness, namely, His resurrection! He conquered His enemies by means of His death, and His resurrection confirmed this! They laughed; they scorned and they mocked, as His life poured out of Him, but death could not hold Him long. The stone was rolled away and He

emerged victorious, having conquered sin, death and the devil by means of His suffering. And here we view Him *not* simply as *One* who rose from the dead, but as the *Firstborn* from the dead, indicating that there is a second and a third and a fourth and in fact, a great multitude who are to follow Him into the glorious resurrection of life eternal! He is the firstborn of a new and redeemed humanity who will stand in resurrected bodies before the presence of our eternal God and Creator forever! In Colossians 1:15-18, we are told, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

And so, we look to Christ *not* only as our example, encouraging us to remain faithful in our witness (even unto death), but also as our future hope of our own resurrection, where we will stand in the face of death and shout aloud, “O death, where is your sting?” This reminds us that whatever we face in this world; whatever hardship, pain, persecution or temptation to compromise, none of these things can ultimately separate us from the resurrection we must and will obtain in Christ! He is the Firstborn, so that we will soon follow by means of His victory! We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us!

c- And then lastly, we are reminded *not* only of our Lord’s Faithful Witness and His resurrection, but also of His glorious exaltation to the highest position of authority over all things in heaven and on earth! Notice, He is also described as, “*the Ruler over the kings of the earth.*”

Will we fear the tyrannical threats of persecuting rulers and governments and worldly powers, which come and go as God pleases? Will we cave into the ungodly demands of economic giants and those who have power to control our finances? Hear then from a Fellow Author of this salutation! He is Ruler over the kings of the earth. No, they don’t necessarily realize or acknowledge this in the present, anymore than Nebuchadnezzar did in the past. But Nebuchadnezzar was brought to see that there is indeed a universal Ruler and God in heaven; He was humbled and so shall all kings be, under the feet of Christ, who reigns even now, righteous and supreme! And brethren, if we fail to see our blessed Lord in His *present* position of authority and rule, by faith, then we are susceptible to being overcome by the threats of those

who sit among their thrones of dust! What is going on in Libya? What will happen in Iran? What about Iraq and North Korea and Saudi Arabia? What of our own government and our economy and the increasing lack of tolerance for Christianity? What do we make of Israel? What of this nation and that nation and this king and that king and this ruler and that ruler???

God knows! But one thing is for sure, and one truth is needed and necessary, whatever may happen at the level of the surface. Our God reigns supreme! Christ is on the throne now! And from the moment He ascended to that throne as the all conquering God-Man, He has reigned supreme over all kings and kingdoms and governments. And He will continue to do so forever...only, soon enough, it will be realized by all, and every knee will bow before His great and almighty power and majesty! We serve not an impotent, nail biting king, but the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

And so, right in this salutation, we come face to face with the eternal and self-existent, omnipotent, omniscient, all powerful, all mighty God, who has always reigned, who is presently reigning and who will always reign, in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our Faithful Witness; who is the Seed of our own coming, blessed resurrection from the dead, who is our God, our King, our inheritance...who is our all in all!

III. The general content of this salutation

And lastly, very quickly brethren, consider then the general content of this salutation:

“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, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth.”

“Grace to you and peace...” from this glorious Triune God! Upon considering the awesome descriptions given and represented by each Person of the Godhead here, what a wonderfully comforting salutation, to hear Him say to us, “Grace to you and peace...!” How fitting for a letter that is going to unveil present and future realities that include the preordained sufferings and trials that will come upon the church, along with the blessed guarantees of preservation granted to all who hear and obey the Lord’s voice here.

We know not what to expect even in our own future. The first century brethren faced great hardship and trial, especially brought about by a persecuting Roman Empire that wielded all manner of threats toward the physical and economic welfare of the church as she sought to maintain her Gospel witness. Those who failed to worship the emperor; those who were determined to worship Christ and Christ alone, often suffered great harm or even martyrdom.

But here, we have a great shield of encouragement to carry, be it to withstand the attacks of physical persecution, of economic persecution or of the great temptation to compromise with a world that is entrenched in materialism and idolatry. Grace to you and peace from our Triune God! Grace; the constant assurance of God's loving favor toward us (in spite of us); the guarantee that no matter what happens, the wonderful mercy and favor of God is upon us, and by His Spirit, will constantly make its way to us, so that we will ever remain under His protective care. And though our lives may even be threatened; and though we may indeed suffer much for our faith in Christ, His grace will always continue to carry us to our preordained, glorious destination! And peace; the ever present reality that God's smile is always upon us. In Christ, we are the children of the living God and nothing can change that! Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord! Our consciences are forever washed and cleared by the all-sufficient, one time bloody sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ!

What more do we need to help us endure, brethren? What more do we need to motivate us onward toward faithfulness in Christ? Grace to you and peace from God the Father, from God the Holy Spirit, and from God the Son! Indeed, the sincerity and reality of this God given salutation, simply carried from John to us, drives us forward with a sense of commitment and wonder as we begin to make our way through this revelatory Epistle!

The Gospel

AMEN!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24&25