

Look! Listen! - And Overcome!

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

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Look! Listen! – And Overcome!

**"As it Was in the Beginning, 'tis Now and
Ever Shall Be"**

Lord's Day Morning

August 19, 2007

Pastor Jeff Crippen

***Glory be to the Father,
And to the Son,
And to the Holy Ghost.***

***As it was in the beginning,
'Tis now, and ever shall be,
World without end,
Amen.***

The Gloria Patri. It really is the Gloria to the Triune God – to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. And this very old Doxology of the Church comes to mind because it expresses much of what we find next in the Revelation at 1:4-8. In fact, this short Doxology really sums up the basic message of the Revelation and of the entire Bible, if you will.

NKJ Revelation 1:4 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, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, 6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. 8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the Beginning and the End,*" says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

"For the praise of His glory, God has redeemed His creation in Christ, and so it shall remain forever and ever. Of this new creation – which we enjoy in part even now, and in its fullness at Christ's coming – there shall be no end. World without end."

What we find in these next five verses is –

1. The Greeting to the Churches (4-5a)
2. The Doxology to Christ (5b-6)
3. The Heralding of the King (7)
4. The Alpha & Omega Declaration (8)

These are the four headings that we intend to read, hear, and heed this morning, though we may well not have time to deal with all of them in one sitting.

NKJ Revelation 1:3 Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time *is* near.

NOTE: Attached you will find a very helpful insight from Dr. Vern Poythress concerning this matter of the nearness of the time.

Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

I. John to the Seven Asian Churches **1:4-5a**

We saw last time that *seven* represents perfection/completion in Revelation (and, really in the entire Bible). When Christ addresses the seven churches in the province of Asia, He is addressing

His entire Church in all ages and all times. He is addressing *us*. This epistle was given by God the Father to Christ to show to His bond-servants. This should tell us at least something of its importance – as does the fact that it is the parting message of the Bible.

And we saw that this is a greeting of *grace and peace* from the Triune God. Each of the three Persons of the godhead are mentioned here –

1. Him who is and who was and who is to come;
2. The seven Spirits who are before His throne [representing the Holy Spirit];
3. And from Jesus Christ.

It is upon the mention of Jesus Christ that John enters into a description of Christ and a doxology to Christ. Notice the descriptive titles John lists –

1. The faithful witness;
2. The firstborn of the dead;
3. The ruler of the kings of the earth.

As to the first – the faithful witness – John is exalting Christ for His perfect earthly ministry. You have this same title in 3:14 –

NKJ Revelation 3:14 " And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ' These things

says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:

This word "witness," as you probably know, is *martus*, from which we get our word martyr. Those who gave testimony of Christ were those who were often killed for that testimony – thus the word took on its current meaning – *martyr*. Jesus Christ is the faithful martyr.

Christ is the faithful and true *martyr/witness*. He is the Word of God, perfectly expressing God. He always spoke and speaks *truth*. What He speaks here to His churches, His Church can believe and trust. You have this stated over and over in the Gospels –

NKJ John 8:28 Then Jesus said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *He*, and *that* I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.

NKJ John 12:49 "For I have not spoken on My own *authority*; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. 50 "And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak."

NKJ John 18:37 Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

Christian – *we are to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth*. We are to speak as He instructs. Truthfully. Exactly according to the Word of God. Christ is our example in this.

"The lord God has opened His ear, and given Him the tongue of the learned that He should know how to speak a word in season, Isaiah 50:4-5. And no matter what men may do to Him, though they smite Him and pluck out his beard in their fury, and cover Him with shame and reproach, He never changes His testimony and does not compromise the truth, Isaiah 50-5-6. He was faithful unto death, even the death of the cross. In life and in death you may rely on His Word: 'Grace and peace to you.'" [Herman Hoeksema, Behold, He Cometh]

Know His Word! Immerse yourself in it. And the speak that Word without compromise, doubt or shame. Be a faithful witness unto death, all the while relying confidently upon the promises of the One Whose word you

can unflinchingly cling to. It will never fail.

Here is the message stated for us in Hebrews 12 -

NKJ Hebrews 12:1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. 4 You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.

Martyrs must always remember that Christ is the Chief Martyr.

The Firstborn of the Dead

And then John names Christ as –

"the firstborn of the dead"

Remember, the Revelation is given to a *suffering Church*. Such a Church can KNOW that Christ's Word is true

– He is the faithful witness. Now, while we have tribulation in this world, we endure because we know He is risen from the dead. And not only is Christ risen, *He is the firstborn of the dead, the firstfruits of that great harvest yet to come – the resurrection of all who are in Christ –*

NKJ Acts 26:23 "that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles."

NKJ 1 Corinthians 15:20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming.

NKJ Colossians 1:18 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.

Though we die for Christ, yet we live!
In fact –

“Blessed are those who die in the Lord from now on.” That is to say, those who die in Christ – even those who are martyred for His name – are better off than they were here in this life.

And Christ is the certainty that we shall be raised – He has conquered death itself.

"Let this especially be the object of your contemplation, the ground of your assurance: Jesus Christ is the first begotten of the dead! The resurrection...should be the ground of your hope, the object of that faith that fills you with joy and peace. Peace, if ever it is to be ours, cannot be of this world: it must come from the other side of death. Here we lie in the midst of death. How then can we have peace? This voice that speaks of grace and peace is not of this world. It does not sound from somewhere among the deep death-shadows in which here we grope and find no way out. It is the resurrection voice! He that speaks stands at the other side of death and the grave as the Risen One! That means that He was dead and is alive again and lives forevermore. He is alive with a new life, a glorious, a victorious life." [Hoeksema]

The Ruler of the kings of the Earth

Now, see how the next title encourages a suffering Church as well –

"the Ruler of the kings of the earth"

Where was the persecution coming from that put the Apostle John on Patmos? Rome. Caesar. And so it has been down through history that so often the seat of kingly power is the source of anti-Christian persecution.

But the Church can take hope. Why? Because this risen Christ *is the King of kings. He rules the kings of the earth. NOW!* That throne to which He was exalted when He ascended is higher than any other throne. Therefore we never need worry that some earthly king – no matter how powerful he might seem – will be able to thwart the decree of God and His purposes for His people that are set out in this book.

NKJ Psalm 2:1 Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, 3 "Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us." 4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The LORD shall hold them in derision. 5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure: 6 "Yet I have set

My King On My holy hill of Zion." 7
"I will declare the decree: the
LORD has said to Me, 'You are My
Son, today I have begotten You. 8
Ask of Me, and I will give *You* the
nations *for* Your inheritance, and
the ends of the earth *for* Your
possession. 9 You shall break
them with a rod of iron; You shall
dash them to pieces like a potter's
vessel.' "

I must quote from Pastor Hoeksema
once again –

*"Christ is the Prince of the rulers of
the earth! Though they may rave
against Him, yet must they do His will.
Even the Neros and Caligulas and
Domitians, the Hitlers and Mussolinis
and Khrushchevs are his servants in
spite of themselves. The Church is
perfectly safe; her salvation and final
victory are sure. 'In the world you
shall have tribulation; but be of good
cheer; I have overcome the world.'
Grace unto you, and peace!"*

"...and from Jesus Christ,

*the faithful witness,
the firstborn of the dead,
and the ruler of the kings of the
earth.'*

Grace and peace.

Now, John does next what we should
find ourselves doing in response to
such a magnificent and thrilling
greeting from the Triune God – he
breaks out in *doxology*. Praise to
Christ.

II. The Doxology to Christ (5b-6)

NKJ Revelation 1:5b To Him who
loved us and washed us from our
sins in His own blood, 6 and has
made us kings and priests to His
God and Father, to Him *be* glory
and dominion forever and ever.
Amen.

It reminds us of James M. Boice's
hymn we often sing – All Praise to
Christ. In fact, I believe this is the
Scripture text this hymn was taken
from –

*To Him who loved us long ago,
Before we came to be,
Who left His throne for worldly
realms,
To save a wretch like me.*

*All praise to Christ
from grateful men,
Forevermore, Amen."*

*To Him who freed us from our sin,
By dying on the cross,
To make us whole without, within,
Redeemed from dreadful loss.*

*All praise to Christ
from grateful men.
Forevermore, Amen.*

This single phrase –

*"To Him who loves us and released us
from our sins by his blood"*

should elicit in us all praise to Christ
from grateful men, to Him be the glory
and the dominion forever and ever.

Do you want to know if you are a
Christian? Ask yourself – *do these
facts ever move you to doxology?* Can
you sing a hymn like this or read a
verse like this and *never* be moved
inside yourself by Christ's love for you
and by your love for Christ? As you
can imagine Lloyd-Jones commenting
at this point –

"the thing is inconceivable!"

Christian, this Jesus Christ, this
faithful and true witness, this firstborn
of the dead, this ruler of the kings of
the earth – *loves you*. And how does
He love you? *By His blood He has
released you from your sins*. Think of
it.

One of the very first words a Greek
student learns is *luo*. You get quite
used to it as you learn the various verb
paradigms. And yet we must *never get*

used to it. Why? Because it is the
very word used here – released.

NOTE: The variation in translation of
this word here is interesting. It is
rendered "washed" in the KJV and
NKJV and "freed" or "released" in
others (NASB, NRSB, NIV). Why the
difference? The verb is the same in
the NT Greek manuscripts. Why did
the KJV render the verb "washed"?
Most likely because of the phrase "by
His blood." How is it we are released
and freed from sin? Well, Christ's
blood washes us.

And yet, the fundamental meaning of
the verb here is –

from luo loose, untie; release, set free; break, set aside; destroy, pull down; break up; allow (Mt 16.19; 18.18)
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Redemption is the thing in view here.
Freedom purchased. The bonds of
slavery untied and the captive set free.

If anyone here today is not in Christ, if
you have not repented of your sin and
turned in full trusting faith in Christ,
then here is something you can know
with certainty about your condition –

*You are not free. You are a prisoner
of sin and the devil. There is a price
on your head because of your sin – a
price which you will never, ever be
able to pay.*

The blood of Christ sets the captive free –

NKJ Romans 6:6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. 7 For he who has died has been freed from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. 10 For *the death* that He died, He died to sin once for all; but *the life* that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It is a very good thing for a Christian to spend regular time meditating upon the sad, burdensome, heavy condition Christ has released us from. Thinking on the mercy shown him. The classic Old Testament picture of pre-redemption life is Israel in Egypt –

NKJ Exodus 1:6 And Joseph died, all his brothers, and all that generation. 7 But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them. 8 Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. 9 And he

said to his people, "Look, the people of the children of Israel *are* more and mightier than we; 10 "come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land." 11 Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. 12 But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel. 13 So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. 14 And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage -- in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve *was* with rigor.

No sabbath rest. Every day. Seven days each week. A slave. Always a slave. Hard toil. A cruel master. This is the picture of the sinner in bondage to the devil.

Just as Israel was redeemed from that slavery by the blood of the Passover lamb, so we are redeemed by the blood of Christ the Lamb.

NOTE: We would do well to make this observation very clearly at this point –

"The life of the sinner outside of Christ is a hard, bitter, heavy bondage. No matter how wealthy the sinner may be, how easy of a life he might fancy himself to have, his condition is that of a slave under a cruel taskmaster – and it can only end in death. For some, the bitterness begins to a greater extent now. Nevertheless, for ALL it will one day be evident to every single person who departs this life without Christ just how hard and bitter it is ."

From such a state, Christian, this One who loved us long ago, before the world began – from such a state He has released us. And it is then not surprising that this theme of Christ's redeeming love setting His people free by His own blood is the theme that heaven resounds with –

NKJ Revelation 5:9 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, 10 and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."

NOTE: By the way, if you go to the monergism.com website (bookstore) you can buy a "Particular Redemption" T-shirt with Rev 5:9 on it. The purpose is to emphasize that these redemption texts demonstrate that Christ actually effected the redemption and purchase of His own particular people on the cross. The "L" in TULIP in other words.

Understand? Before the world began Christ set His love upon *those He loves now* and in the fullness of time He went to the cross where He actually effected the release of His people by His own blood. And those people are people *out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation*. He did not, in other words, shed His blood for every human being in every tribe, tongue and people and nation.

A Kingdom, Priests to His God

Now the Exodus imagery continues. There was Israel in bondage in Egypt – set free by God's power under the blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts. God led the Israelites out of Egypt, across the Red Sea and into the wilderness and made a covenant with them. And in all of this, a people who had not been a people were made into a special nation belonging to God. Listen –

NKJ Exodus 19:1 In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai. 2 For they had departed from Rephidim, had come to the Wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain. 3 And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 4 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. 5 'Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth *is* Mine. 6 'And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

This is a theme referenced over and over again in the Old Testament and in the New –

NKJ 1 Peter 2:5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 Therefore it is also contained in the

Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." 7 Therefore, to you who believe, *He is* precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone," 8 and "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. 9 But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

What is very significant is that this theme of believers as a kingdom and priests to God is underscored in the Revelation –

NKJ Revelation 5:10 And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."

NKJ Revelation 20:6 Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

This biblical doctrine – that Christ's people are a kingdom of/and priests to God – requires a much closer look. To do so, we will have to go back to the Old Testament and find these same phrases – there of course applied immediately to the nation of Israel. This we will plan to do next time. And we will see even more clearly that the Old Testament provides us with earthly, temporal types and symbols (in this case, the earthly Israel) which aid us in grasping the eternal, heavenly realities they depict (the Church as the real Israel of God with believers as priests to God).

For now, as we conclude, take notice of the conclusion of John's doxology –

"- to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen."

We were nothing. We are nothing in ourselves. We were objects of God's just wrath. We were as the Gentiles of old – cut off from the covenants and promises of God, without God and without hope. And while we, while *you*, were in that very condition of nothingness and wretchedness, the Ruler of the kings of the earth -

"loved us and released us from our sins by His blood."

How can we but join John's doxology

***Glory be to the Father,
And to the Son,
And to the Holy Ghost.***

***As it was in the beginning,
'Tis now, and ever shall be,
World without end,
Amen.***

**The Returning King
(Dr. Vern Poythress)**

NKJ Revelation 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants -- things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John,

“How can the events take place ‘soon’ (vs 1) if nearly two thousand years have passed since John wrote (see also 22:6-7, 10, 12, 20)? The answer is that spiritual war takes place throughout the church age, and that the seven churches will soon experience all the dimensions of the conflict. Moreover, ‘the last days’ foretold in Old Testament prophecy were inaugurated by Christ’s resurrection (Acts 2:16-17). The time of waiting is over, and God is conducting the final phase of his victorious warfare against evil. By such reckoning, today is ‘the last hour’ (1 John 2:18).

The wording in Rev 1:1 seems to be built on Daniel 2:45 –

NKJ Daniel 2:45 "Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold -- the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure."

- where God showed King Nebuchadnezzar 'what will take place in the future.' In Revelation 1:1, God shows his servants what must take place 'soon.' In Daniel, the vision is impressively far-ranging. It starts with Nebuchadnezzar's time, but then reaches out to encompass subsequent pagan world empires until the times when God's kingdom is established (Dan 2:44-45). The kingdom of God was inaugurated by the first coming of Christ (Mark 1:15; Luke 11:20; Rom 14:17), but its consummation is still to come. We live in 'the last days' (2 Tim 3:1, 12; Heb 1:2), in the midst of fulfillments that are still working themselves out. Daniel spoke of events that, from his perspective, were in the distant future. These events are now occurring around us. Hence, Revelation properly says that they are 'soon' to occur, in contrast to their distance from the time of Daniel. We are to understand that these days – from the first century until now – are the end times of spiritual conflict, in which 'many antichrists' operate (1 John 2:18). Whether a clock measures the time until the Second Coming as a few hours or many centuries is irrelevant."