

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 6/7/98 PM
Revelation 1:4-8 "The Jesus Many Don't Know"

Suppose on the way to church this evening, a neighbor stopped you and said, "Can I ask you a question. I'm embarrassed to even ask it, but I have to know. Who is Jesus? Would you show me from the Bible who He is *really*?"

Where in the Bible would you take your friend? You could go to Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John--to one of the four biographical accounts of Jesus' life--and show your neighbor the portrait of the miracle-worker from Nazareth. That would be a good place to go to present Jesus to someone.

Or, you could take your friend to the Old Testament. Once there, you could present to your seeker the prophetic anticipation of what the Bible said the Messiah Jesus would be and do *before* He even came. That, too, would be fruitful study.

Or, you could lead your friend to the book of Acts, and help him to see the story of how Jesus changed lives, started His Church, and transformed the world in the first century. That's a possibility.

Or perhaps, you would take your neighbor to the epistles in the New Testament, to those letters written by men like Peter, Paul, and John, men who personally saw Jesus. From those letters (like Romans, Galatians, 1 Peter, and 1 John) you could show your friend the explanation of Who Jesus is, the significance of what Jesus did, and the application of how to know and live for Him.

Who is Jesus? That's an important question, a question with *eternal* implications. In a conversation on Monday I had a teenager honestly tell me he didn't believe in Jesus and for that matter didn't believe there even was a God.

So who is this Jesus that some follow and others deny, some praise and others curse, some love and others ignore. Who is He?

To answer that question we could go to the gospels, or to the Old Testament prophets, or to the book of Acts, or to the Epistles. But we won't. Instead I want to take you to a place in the Bible that reveals Jesus in a very special way, to a passage that presents the Jesus that many don't know (including many who call themselves "Christians"), to a book that begins with these words, "The revelation of Jesus Christ."

The truth is, Christianity is not a religion per se. What we're all about is not system of rules. It's a relationship. It's a relationship with Jesus, but not just any Jesus. It's a relationship with the Jesus of the Bible, and not just the parts we pick and choose, either.

It's sad, yet tragically true. Many people have never met the Jesus presented in Revelation 1. Perhaps you're one of them. But tonight you will. You're going to see a picture of the Jesus that many don't know. And it can change your life.

The Bible is a big book in which it's easy to miss the forest for the trees. So let me give you the panorama of the forest at the outset. The Bible begins with God living in fellowship with mankind, a fellowship which was broken by sin. And the Bible ends with a description of God living in fellowship with a redeemed mankind. What's in the middle is the story of how God did it, and He did it through a very special person.

The Bible begins with God exalted, and the Bible ends with God exalted. And the rest of the Bible is the story of the Person who did it, the One who accomplished the task of restoring sinful people so that they might exalt God as He deserves.

It's that person who we meet in Revelation 1:4-8 [read].

In verse 4, we're introduced to the penman of this apocalyptic picture of Jesus. "John." If any person is qualified to show us Jesus, John is. John was a disciple of Jesus, one of the twelve who was a three-year eyewitness of the Master. After Jesus returned to heaven, John spent the next 60 years of his life telling the world about Jesus. He wrote five books: the gospel of John (a record of Jesus' life), three letters to Christians (known as 1, 2, & 3 John), and this book known as Revelation (also a letter, but a very special letter).

Verse 4 indicates, "John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia." You see, in the six decades between Jesus' ascension and John's writing of this book, the gospel of Jesus spread and filled the known world of the Roman Empire. In just sixty years, Christianity went from a handful of followers at a Prayer meeting in Jerusalem (Acts 2) to literally dozens of churches and thousands of Christians all over the world.

John sent this book to seven of the churches, located in Asia Minor (which is in modern day Turkey). The seven churches are named in chapters 2-3. To them John offered this greeting (4b): "Grace and peace to you." Grace--that's God's unmerited help; it's also the customary Greek greeting. Peace--Shalom; that's the assurance that all is well between you and God eternally; it's also the customary Hebrew greeting.

Where do obtain grace and peace? The answer is from the Triune God--"from him who is, and who was, and who is to come [a reference to God the Father]¹, and from the seven spirits before his throne [a reference to God the Holy Spirit], and from Jesus Christ [a reference to God the Son]."

Think about this. What makes Christianity so dynamic? What makes it unique? The answer, negatively, is this. It's not a religion. It's not something man (or a group of men) developed. It's not an organized attempt by people to reach and appease God. No, it's none of that. Rather, Christianity is built on the foundation of what God did. God did something to reach, reclaim, and restore us to Himself. And He did it through a person, the person we're about to meet.

I mentioned the young man who told me on Monday he didn't believe in God. He wasn't alone. I was in a conversation with four teenagers, two of which bluntly told me, "I don't believe in God," while the other two said they did. It was interesting while in the course of our discussion that one of the fellows who said he believed in God asked his friend who said he *didn't*, "Why not?"

To which the second teen responded, "Because it's a joke. The whole thing is something hypocrites devised."

He was being honest. But is he right? Is Christianity based on a hypocritical sham? Is there no basis for believing in the person of Jesus Christ?

Before you answer that, I want to do something, and then let you decide. I want to show you a picture of Jesus, of the Jesus many don't know, but the Jesus that John saw.

¹Acc. to Alan Johnson, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 420.

The exalted Jesus. John didn't paint with a canvas, but with words. God used John to give us a word picture of the Jesus many don't know.

In this picture in Revelation 1:4-8, three features of Jesus stand out to us.

I. We see Who He is (5).

Who is Jesus? From John's description, He is three things.

1. He is the faithful witness. Even most who know very little about Jesus know this. He lived an exemplary life. The fact is He lived a perfect life. He came as a reliable witness to the kingdom of God. With His words and works, He testified the message His Father had given Him. He was loyal even to the point of death. He is the faithful witness.

2. He is the firstborn from the dead. He's the first to ever conquer death. That must have encouraged John's original readers who were facing persecution and the threat of death. Our Lord, the One we follow, has power over death!

He's the first begotten of the dead. "First" implies there are others to follow--all who know Him.

3. He is the ruler of the kings of the earth. Don't miss that. He's *the* Ruler. In John's day, Emperor Domitian occupied the Roman throne, a ruler who made life very bitter for Christians. John knew his readers needed this truth.

To whom do we belong? To the One who is THE ruler, THE prince of the kings of the earth. Do you think of Jesus that way? Do you see Him as the One who is in charge of this planet, who controls the destiny of even the most powerful of rulers? He is!

You say, "When I look at the world, it doesn't seem like it. If He's the ruler, why can't I see Him?" You will. But right now He rules *in cognito*.

Which brings me to address a problem. The world is full of people who believe in Jesus, but not in the Jesus of the Bible. They believe in a Jesus that man has manufactured.

For some, Jesus is a great teacher, perhaps the greatest teacher who ever lived, but no more than that. The way to reach God is to look to Jesus for advice and wisdom.

For others, Jesus is a great example, a hero of sorts. Yes, He lived a great life. He's the one God sent to be our example. The way to reach God is to follow Him, to walk in His steps, to live as He lived. That's how you become a Christian, just choose to do your best in living like Jesus. Is that true? Many think so.

For still others, Jesus is like a New Age guide. A popular buzzword is, "What He is we may become." Jesus is a person who tapped into the innate spiritual resources that are hidden in the depths of every person, and if we'll learn to do what he did, we may become like him. Really?

Here's my challenge. See if you can find *that* Jesus in Revelation 1 (or anywhere else in the Bible for that matter!). My friend, here's the real Jesus. He's the faithful witness who lived a perfect life. He's the firstborn of the dead, the One who died and conquered death. He's the ruler of rulers, the Lord of the universe.

Do you know *that* Jesus? As our eyes scan the picture of Jesus in Revelation 1, we soon notice a second feature of Jesus.

II. We see what He did (5b-6).

We see His accomplishments, three of them, one present and two past.

1. He loves us. That's what verse 5 says. "To him who loves us." Wow! This One who is the Ruler of all rulers, who is the most powerful person in the universe...loves us!

That's amazing! Other religions are based on man's attempts to pacify, please, and reach God. Only Christianity is based on true love. God gave to us. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son.

Frankly, that's why refusing to trust Christ is so offensive to God. It's the essence of haughty pride to reject God's love-offer and foolishly assert, "I'm okay. I don't need Jesus." My friend, Jesus' love is like no other's. John describes Him as the one "who loves us." That's what He does. There's more according to the last phrase in verse 5.

2. He has set us free from our sins. Right there is our #1 problem. It's not a lack of money, or education. It's not political or social. It's sin. It's the fact that we have turned away from God and gone our own way in life. That's what sin is, going our own way instead of God's. That's cosmic treason, the penalty of which is eternal condemnation.

If sin is our #1 problem, and it is, right here we discover the only remedy. Blood. *His* blood. Jesus is the One who freed us from our sins *by His blood*.

His blood did what our self-righteous attempts to reach God could never do. His blood made atonement for our sins. There's more.

3. He has made us to be a kingdom and priests. Verse 6 reveals, "And has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father."

Did you notice something? Jesus doesn't set us free from sin so we can do our own thing. He sets us free so we can do what we were created to do in the first place. Serve God.

Isn't that what Adam did before he sinned? He served God in the garden-paradise. But when he sinned, he forfeited that privilege. He was cut off from God. But Jesus reversed our situation. Through Jesus we regain what Adam lost.

What will heaven be like? Will we be floating around on clouds, plucking a harp and polishing a halo? No. In the new heaven and new earth, we'll engage in delightful service to God.

But we don't have to wait to serve Him. Because of Jesus we can do it now! We are subjects of His kingdom. We are priests who have direct access to God. All because of what Jesus did!

Which brings us to the third feature of Jesus in this amazing picture. And it's the third feature which we most often fail to consider when we think of Jesus. We've seen who He is and what He did. Now...

III. We see what He will do (7).

"Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen." Here's the picture of what Jesus will do--three things.

1. He is coming back. "Look," John writes, "He is coming with the clouds." He's coming! Yes, He's coming back to this planet. The first time He came He didn't

receive the welcome He deserved. In fact, He came in obscurity. But not the next time. For when He comes the second time...

2. He will let everyone see Him. According to the revelation God gave John, "Every eye will see Him." Every eye. He will come in like manner as He left, "with the clouds." Every one will see Him, even those who "pierced Him." The very people responsible for His death will see Him. Pilate will. Annas will. Caiphas will. The Sanhedrin members will. The soldiers will. You will. I will.

How will the world respond when Jesus comes? According to the picture in verse 7...

3. All will mourn because of Him. "All the peoples [lit. tribes] of the earth will mourn because of Him." Why will there be mourning? Because the One they see has come in judgment.

When an artist finishes his painting, what does he usually do? He signs it with his name. Verse 8 is like God's signature on this portrait of Jesus.

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

Someone might say, "Well, I don't like this kind of Jesus. I like the kind of Jesus that's loving and always makes everybody feel good. I don't like the kind of Jesus who's going to come to this world in judgment." My friend, the issue isn't what you think of Jesus, but what God Himself says.

Perhaps you're thinking, "I'll take my chances. I'm not sure I buy this picture of Jesus." Then investigate. Study the Word of God to find out who Jesus is. But don't ignore Him. The stakes are much too high.

John concludes verse 7 with a double affirmation, "So shall it be! Amen."

My friend, this is Jesus. You've seen the picture of Jesus tonight. You've seen who He is--the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, the ruler of all rulers. You've seen what He did--the One who loves us, who set us free from our sin by shedding His blood, and who made us a kingdom and priests in service to God. And you've seen what He will do--He's coming, and everyone will see Him, and the world will mourn.

The question is, do you know this Jesus? Are you ready to meet Him? To be ready, you must do this. You must repent of your sin and trust in Him. If you do, He will come into your life and give you new life, eternal life! Is there any reason you should not do so right now?