

me and acts accordingly? John responds in his hymn or doxology “to Him who loves us and has freed us from our sin. Does God still love me? Is God still acting on my behalf for my good? John reminds us. God loves us and has freed us from our sin. If God can do this then all things are possible with God. We can trust God’s character toward us.

We can trust God’s power. John reminds us that the day is coming when everyone will know that Jesus is Lord. Even those who pierced Him will know and all the peoples of the earth will know. There is coming a day when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. If Jesus is raised and is coming again, then surely we can trust God’s power in our lives as well.

To that young man who was hurt in the motorcycle accident the woman said over and over again... the worst is over the healing has already begun. That is the message of the risen Lord. That is the message of Revelation. No matter what we might pass through because Jesus lives the healing has already begun.



¹William L. Turner “Making Sense of Revelation.” Smyth and Helwys, p. 9

²Turner, p. 10

³James Blevins “Revelation as Drama”. Broadman Press.

⁴Turner, p. 6



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Jesus - The Risen One

Revelation 4:1-8

TRINITY PULPIT



In her sermon from this text Eugenia Gamble tells this story:

Several years ago, when I was a pastor in the Denver Colorado area, a colleague of mine told me a story of a friend of hers who was traveling home to Denver on a Sunday afternoon from a conference north along the front range of the Rocky Mountains in Fort Collins. The conference had been a good one. The man and the woman were driving home full of what they had learned and talking about how they might use their new learning in their work situations. As they rounded a curve in the road they came upon a serious motorcycle accident. The motorcycle seemed to catch on something and flip into the air. The driver, without a helmet, was thrown fifty yards or so, and the bike landed not far away.

The two were the first to arrive. The man was driving and pulled off the road just north of the accident. Before he shut off the ignition the woman was out of the car and running to the side of the accident victim. The man stopped another car and sent the occupants for help while he began to try to direct traffic. At one point in the chaos he glanced at the woman. She was crouched next to the unconscious young man, stroking his hair and talking to him.

When the ambulance arrived and the young man was whisked away, the man and the woman got back into their car in silence. There was blood on the woman's hands and around the hem of her skirt. After a moment, the man said, "I saw you talking to that young man. He was obviously unconscious. He may even have been dead. What could you possibly have been saying to him?"

"I just told him over and over," She replied, "I just told him, the worst is over. The healing has already begun."

That may be the best description of words of Revelation. To a people who were suffering and wondering if the worst was over or was it to come, John seems to be saying as bad as it might get in this world what you need to know is that through the risen Christ the healing has already begun.

The Apostle John exiled on the Isle of Patmos is given a revelation or an apocalypse, which means an uncovering or pulling back of the curtain, to give hope to Christians who were facing persecution. As John states in the very first verse of Revelation, a verse that many interpreters seem to skip, Jesus is showing John “what must soon take place.” Blessed are those who read the words and blessed are those who hear it and take it to heart because the time is near.

Bill Turner writes in his book “Making Sense of the Revelation: A Clear Message of Hope” that in regards to Revelation we must find our answers in the text itself. Gathering our thoughts around historical setting, unique literature and overall theme, we can establish a sound footing. Any message for our century and beyond must be rooted in this context. Without it, (that is understanding the context of the book) would be like a high wire act without a safety net.

If Revelation has something to say for our day then it is only when we understand what it had to say in John’s day to the early church and to the original recipients. When we understand that word we can hear God’s word for us. Jim Dennison, in his commentary on Revelation, suggests that it is vital to understand that Revelation was not written to us, but rather to the early church. Only when we understand this do we have a place to begin to hear the word of hope for our day.

What was the setting of Revelation? Revelation is written in a time of great turmoil for the church. John, we believe was a political prisoner on Patmos. There as he suffered along with those in the churches in Asia. What was happening to the churches in Asia? They were under great persecution.

When we think about persecution of Christians in Rome we normally might think about Nero who fiddled, while Rome burned but Nero’s was Caesar from 54 to 68 A.D. However, his meanness is nothing compared to Domitian who was Caesar from 81 to 96. Emperor worship has been a part of the Roman Empire

for many years, but none took it quite as serious as Domitian. In the Roman world there was great diversity of religions. Rome genius was to allow conquered places keep their gods and their cultural norms. Once a year, however, Rome required its subjects to go to a Roman Temple and burn a pinch of incense and say Caesar is Lord. Failure to comply with this meant punishment even death. Domitian enforced the law. It was largely a political requirement helping to solidify Rome's power. In addition, Domitian wanted to be called "our Lord our god."

The Jews had been given immunity, but not the Christians. Because the Christians did not worship Domitian they were singled out as unpatriotic and subversive. From 90 to 96 A.D. the persecution intensified. In this time, it was the bloodiest time in the history of the young churches. Revelation then is a word of hope for a future for a people who thought they had no future. So, here is our setting, an exiled disciple who is a political prisoner writing to churches that are out numbered, under the scrutiny of a blood thirsty ruler and they have been singled out so they can be made and example of for others. As the brutality and persecution intensifies their question is simply, will we survive? Has God a plan? Has God forgot us? Is Jesus still on the throne? Is God still able to make any difference in this world?

It is to this incredible uncertainty that God reveals and John writes. In these first few verses John wants to reassure the church that God does have a plan, Jesus is still on the throne and hope and victory will be theirs.

The first answer John has from the Lord for the church is "God has a word for you."

John to the seven churches in the province of Asia Grace an peace to you from him who is and how was and is to come and from the seven spirits before his throne and from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

John encourages the young church with this word. God has a word for you and that word is grace and peace. John describes God in wonderful terms here in verse 4 and 5.

John describes the Triune God in terms of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. First, John says, "God the Father has a word of grace and peace for you. The one who is and who was and who is to come." It is the same description that Jesus speaks in verse 8. "I am the Alpha and Omega. Who is and who was and is to come the Almighty."

The description of God is one who has always been and always will be. There is nothing before God and in a sense there is nothing that will succeed God. God is the beginning and the end of all things and the other point

is just as important and that is everything in between beginning and end is about God. God is the one who was. God created all things. Everything is in existence because of God. God was and before anything else was there was the creating God. God is to come. God will get the last say. God is not through with this world. God is continuing God's creative and imaginative work in this world and in the lives of all. God will come and bring everything to an end in God's own way and God's own time. We do not have to worry if God is going to abandon us in the future. God is to come.

However, I think maybe the other term is most important to me. God is. In fact, He begins with the term is. Present and in this moment, God is. I think that is an important message for those in the early church and for us. We can intellectually consider that God was, that is God is creator. We can have the hope that God is to come. That God holds the future. However, what we need to know right now in this moment is that God is. God is right here and right now.

A pastor friend of mine tells the story of how his deacons meetings were transformed. They use to begin with the normal payer requests, which simply became that game we play at church called who can give the most details of someone's terrible circumstance or the most intimate details of someone's illness. He decided as important as it was to pray for one another, the tone of the meeting needed to be changed. From all evidence it appeared that God was nowhere to be found and life was one long misery. So, now before the meeting can begin there has to be at least five people share where they have seen the evidence of God in the past month. It could be in their own lives or in the life of the church. The first thing they do before they "get down to business" is to be reminded that God is still in business. John says the God is was and is to come has a word for you and that word is God is.

John mentions the Holy Spirit in terms that we do not find in other places in the scripture, but here John describes the Holy Spirit at the seven spirits who are before the throne. Why this description? Some would suggest it has to do with the seven fold ministry of the Spirit as mentioned in Isaiah. Others say it has to do with the completeness and sacredness of the number seven. So the seven spirits is one way of saying the whole or complete spirit of God. In Zechariah there is a reference to seven eyes of the Lord that range throughout the world.

I like the interpretation that it is the Holy Spirit, because I think that is obvious in its placement in this verse. However this description of seven spirits seems to show the readiness of the Holy Spirit. We might be able to say the ever-working Spirit of God. God does not tire, nor does God slumber. The God who is, is also the God who is always at work. God is always at work in our world. God is always bringing good in every situation for those who are called according to God's purpose and those who love God. The message is God has a word for you.

The God who is and the God who is at work.

The God who has a word for you is Jesus. Jesus is described in three terms. First, Jesus is the faithful witness. The term here is the term where we get martyr. Jesus is the faithful martyr. Jesus was obedient to God's will even to death on the cross. Jesus' death was not defeat. Jesus death was victory. His death was not a mistake, but Jesus' death is a faithful witness of God's plan for us. Jesus was a witness of who God is and for Jesus that meant death. So, John is saying to the young church you might face persecution and face even death, but you too can be a faithful witness.

For death is not the end. Jesus is the firstborn from the dead. The term firstborn means there are others who are going to follow. Jesus is not the only one who will be resurrected. God's power of resurrection is not limited to Jesus, but through Jesus God's power over death is extended to the church. Even death cannot defeat Jesus. He is the risen one. He is the firstborn from the dead and the promise of our resurrection as well.

He is the ruler of the kings of the earth. It might appear that Caesar is in charge. It might appear to the young church that Domitian is "lord and god." He is not, John reminds them. Jesus is the ruler of all the kings of the earth.

To a people who were wondering if God had abandoned them or if God had a plan for their future, John writes yes. The God who is, the God who is working, the God who is expressed fully in Jesus death and resurrection is still on the throne. Nothing has changed. You might be passing through fear, uncertainty and even persecution but God is still God and God has a word for you. That word is grace and peace.

Two words that sum up God's good intentions toward us. They are sometimes just words of salutation, but here I think they are much more. To a people who are wondering if God cares. God offers grace. The word picture is God stooping down or bending down to us. It is not that we can ascend to God, but God bends down to us. Does God care? God bends down.

Peace. The term means more than absence of conflict, but is that incredible word of salvation. The term used for peace is not simply the opposite of war but a state of being where one is at peace with God, self and others. It denotes rest, assurance, and comfort. God has a word for the early church in turmoil. That word means to be at rest, or be assured, or comforted and be at peace.

It is at this point that John breaks into song. In a reflection of this word from God John breaks into a song of praise. Reminding us of God's love and God's work in our lives. James Blevins, who was a long time Professor of New Testament at Southern Seminary, wrote a wonderful book years ago entitled "Revelation as Drama." Dr. Blevins suggests we should read Revelation as a drama or even a musical. There are stages and actor and prompters and of course there is the choir. If you read Revelation over and over again after a declaration is made or something wonderful happens the actors break into song. So it is here in this first chapter. In reflection of who's God and God's word to the church John breaks into a song of praise.

TO YOU AND ME TODAY
REVELATION SAYS TO US AND
EVERY GENERATION WE CAN
TRUST GOD'S FUTURE. THE
ONE WHO IS AND WAS AND IS
TO COME IS ALWAYS THE SAME.
JOHN REMINDS US WE HAVE A
PURPOSE FOR THIS LIFE. WE
ARE THE PRIESTS OF GOD AND
WE ARE CALLED TO SERVE GOD.

To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood and has made us to be a kingdom of priests to serve His God and Father to Him be glory, power forever and ever Amen.

Second verse:

Look He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him and even those who pierce Him and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of Him. So shall it be! Amen.

To a people who were wondering about where is God and is Jesus still king? John writes, yes.

As we consider this passage today I want to give us three thoughts to hold on to.

First, we can trust God's future. During the Korean War reporter Marguerite Higgins was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for her front line coverage. One of her stories was about the 5th Company of Marines, which had 18,000 soldiers and their battle with over 100,000 Chinese Communist Soldiers. It was particularly cold. It was 42 below 0 one morning and everyone was standing around. She noticed a marine who was eating his pork and beans with a trench knife. His clothes were frozen stiff as a board. His face was covered with a heavy beard and crusted with mud. The correspondent asked him "If I were God and could grant you anything you wished, what would you most like?" The Marine stood still for a moment and then raised his head and said, "Give me tomorrow." Tomorrow... it is what we all want. We want to know that there is a future.

To you and me today Revelation says to us and every generation we can trust God's future. The one who is and was and is to come is always the same. John reminds us we have a purpose for this life. We are the priests of God and we are called to serve God. God has a future and a plan for you and me.

We can trust God's character. Can I trust that God loves