

Date: October 11, 2017
 Title: Jesus: The Ruler of the Kings of the Earth
 Text: Rev. 1:4-8
 Theme: God creates all, controls all, and commands all (cf. Philippians 2:1-18).

Introduction:

“The God in Revelation is the same God who manifests self in the entire Sacred Christian Canon. Through Jesus Christ, this God poured out the Holy Spirit upon John to be both the witness and instrument of God’s voice, signs and wonders. The book’s title is mentioned in the first verse and its main goal is to alert readers to what they will encounter as the narrative unfolds. In theological terms; Revelation refers to an “unveiling,” of a worldview previously hidden from ordinary eyes; especially from the eyes of the oppressed people of Asia Minor. **It is not a secret that Revelation was written to an oppressed group of people who experienced a nightmare from Imperial rule. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus through John summons readers and hearers not to worship Caesar and not to hear imperial propaganda as the final word.**”¹

THE BIG PICTURE:

- The Historical Context

“During Imperial Rome the balance of power in higher classes shifted dramatically. A new social class came about that changed the way social classes worked. Imperial domus was a new social class which included the emperor and his family. Emperors controlled all affairs in the empire and were put above all others in society. Emperors were even considered gods until the rise of Christianity.”²

“The Imperial cult was inseparable from that of Rome's official deities, whose cult was essential to Rome's survival and whose neglect was therefore treasonous.”³

“Emperor worship

The cult of Roman emperors, living and dead, became the State religion throughout the empire, though it originated as a simple act of thankfulness for the peace and stability brought by Rome. Temples were erected in honour of Julius Caesar soon after his death (44 BCE) and to Augustus in his lifetime, e.g. at Pergamum. This explains the reference to ‘Satan's throne’ (Rev. 2: 13). In this city, as elsewhere, the cult developed because local people wanted it not in order to flatter the establishment but out of genuine gratitude for the benefits brought by Rome, and it was not felt to be a substitute for existing religions. Nevertheless, as the feelings of gratitude faded, the imperial cult became more and more a test of loyalty to the regime. The consequence was that refusal to perform the outward rituals was bound to incur penalties. Both Jews and Christians were conscientiously unable to burn incense to any human being: Jews, after some initial persecution, got exemption from Claudius; but Christians suffered when the Church's numbers expanded sufficiently to attract the State's hostile attention (1 Pet. 4: 16). Failure to give divine honours to the emperor or ‘to swear by the genius of Caesar’ was not the only ground for persecution; but the anti-Christian writer Celsus (about 178 CE) warned Christians of the perils

of their lack of civic sense and of their disloyalty to an empire from which they derived many material benefits."⁴

The Roman Cult of Emperor Worship

April 2, 2010 in Jewish Christian Literature, Revelation

Many scholars see worship of the emperor as the background for the worship of the Beast in Revelation 13:4, 15-16; 14:9-11, 15:2, 16:2, 19:20, 20:4. If this is true, then we need to know when emperor worship became an empire-wide phenomenon. The standard view of Emperor worship found in many popular commentaries comes from William Ramsay, writing at the turn of the 20th century:

“...in no part of the world was there such fervent and sincere loyalty to the emperors as in Asia. Augustus had been a saviour to the Asian peoples, and they deified him as the Saviour of mankind, and worshiped him with the most whole-hearted devotion as the ‘present deity’.” W. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1909) 115.

Julius Caesar allowed himself to be worshiped as a god, but his successor Augustus only allowed emperor worship outside of the city of Rome. Augustus is known in some inscriptions as CAESAR DIVI FILIUS, Son of God, that is, Son of eternal Caesar. Oaths were taken on the divine spirit of the emperor. His image was publicly adored. Worship of the image was a regular military duty. Caligula was the first emperor to demand to be worshiped, he demanded that citizens everywhere bow to his statue. Nero also claimed to be divine, although in neither case was there a requirement to worship the emperor. As Augustus had been Zeus incarnate, so Nero was Apollo incarnate. Even Seneca called him as the long-awaited savior of the world.

Domitian took the title “lord and god” and ordered people to confess he was “lord and god” as a test of loyalty (Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars*, Book 8: *Domitian* 13). Marital says the “beasts in the arena” hailed him as a god. While this is clearly legendary, it does reflect a contemporary writer implying divine honors for Domitian. Dio Cassius (*Roman History* 67.14) refers to Domitian exiling a Flavius Clemens and his wife, Flavia Domitilla for “atheism.” Atheism is the charge made against those who drifted into “things Jewish.” Dio Chrysostom reported that Domitian liked to “be flattered” as “master and god.” Those who refused to flatter him in this way risked trouble. (*In Oratorio* 45:1, see also *First Discourse on Kingship*, 1.14-15).

How prevalent was the imperial cult in Asia Minor? Of the seven cities mentioned in Revelation 2-3, five have imperial priests and altars (all but Philadelphia and Laodicea) and six have imperial temples (all but Thyatira). At Pergamum an imperial temple was established as early as 28 B.C. The city was so central to the imperial cult that Revelation describes this city as having the “throne of Satan.” In short, a Christian in Asia Minor could not avoid the Imperial Cult.

It was during the reign of Domitian when the imperial cult became a factor in unifying the empire in Asia Minor. The provincial cult allowed the Roman network of social obligations to be extended to virtually the whole population. If you lived within the empire, then you were a social client of the Emperor and owed him supreme allegiance. It is not hard to see, therefore, the struggle which Christians in the late first century would have showing allegiance to Rome – if that allegiance required worship of the Emperor, then the Christian must refuse or compromise their faith.”⁵

The Melodic Line - From Genesis through the Church to the final chapters of Revelation, the *Story* of God comes full circle.

There are five prominent notes shaping this climatic conclusion.

THEMES / NOTES

1. Perhaps a primary note sounds in Revelation is, "The Sovereignty of God."

The idea of sovereignty is foreign to our thinking. We think of control and perhaps of power. However, seldom do we think in terms of absolute sovereignty or control. This text and the entire Letter of Revelation speaks of a sovereign who is the first and the last, the one who was, is, and will be. It is not simply speaking of one who knows or oversees, but intervenes and acts. This sovereign is fully engaged with events.

The idea of God's sovereignty is also placed in the context of Roman sovereignty. The question is, "Who is in charge, who has the power, and to whom do you [the citizen] owe allegiance, who will you obey?" There is an intentional contrast between all earthly powers and authority and that of God's power and authority.

This is why the descriptives are so powerful and Revelation 5 speaks to the scroll as a title deed over all of God's creation. However, we will wait until chapter 5 to unpack that idea more thoroughly.

This talk of sovereignty is two-fold. First, this sovereignty speaks of control. Second, this sovereignty speaks of command. Not only does God have control of this world, but He commands loyalty from its subjects.

Three thoughts are notable. The logic is as follows.

- First, He creates all things
- Second, He controls all He creates
- Finally, He commands all He creates

Revelation and the Acts passage work well together. Peter and the apostles had been ordered to stop teaching in the name of Jesus, but they have refused (Acts 4:15-22; 5:26-42). When hauled before the high priest, they answer, "We must obey God rather than any human authority" (Acts 5:29). Once again, the question is--who is God? Who is the God who is to be worshipped and obeyed? But--alas!--that returns us to the Doubting Thomas story, where Thomas calls Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" That exclamation raises, in turn, the question: **Who is the Lord of this world?** And that returns us to the Revelation text.⁶

Revelation 1:4-8

2. On equal footing is, "The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ." We will note how His "blood" permeates the entire *Story*. Without the substitutionary and securing blood sacrifice of Jesus, nothing would have been gained and all would be lost.
3. It would be thoughtless to exclude from these primary notes, "The Sealing of the Holy Spirit." Two ideas become prominent. First, those who have ears let them hear what the SPIRIT says. Secondly, the people of God are "sealed" and thus secured to the end.
4. The next two notes, "The Assault of the Serpent and his seed" and
5. "The Suffering of His People" work together. The serpent's seed has always sought to destroy God's *Story* and the woman's offspring. The Letter of Revelation unveils for the Christian what the Christ life looks like on the horizontal as they pledge their love and loyalty to King Jesus.

With this in mind, let us consider the text before us.

Outline:

- I. A Blessing from God (vv. 4-5a).

"In the greeting, John uses a triad of 'threes', which again is a number of the divine and from this flows the three sources of grace, peace and life (Revelation 1:4-5). Embedded in the greeting are also the three titles of God of which John uses to characterize the narrative of the book. It is God not Caesar who is the benefactor of people and thus **John writes to make readers aware of the dangers of imperial portraits seen at all the chief intersections of urban life**. The sovereign essence of God is amplified by such epithets as "the Alpha and the Omega, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty (Revelation 1:8), and these names and titles of God subvert claims of Roman Emperors. **Contemporary readers of Revelation are also summoned to be aware of the dangers of imperial portraits seen in advertisements, political propaganda, and political party promises**. Unlike other books of the Bible, Revelation has a very extensive critique of imperial ideology, militarism, and trade. Thus its theology is basically political in the sense that every aspect of imperial outlook is analyzed, critiqued and brought into its proper place"⁷

- A. TO WHOM (v. 4a)
 - a. "The seven churches that are in Asia."

"The opening of the letter, especially in Revelation 1:4-8 informs readers of the name of the sender, the recipients of the message who are the seven churches mentioned in chapters 2 and 3, and the greeting to the listeners. The readers of the 21st century might be perplexed by the number seven but from John's perspective, everything is seen from the heavenly view and thus Revelation is embedded with symbolic divine language. Seven is signifier of completeness or perfection, suggesting that **the Book of Revelation was not just written for the seven congregations in Asia Minor but rather, the book was written to the Church [global] including other small communities of faith that were in and around Asia Minor**. While the

language of Revelation does not resonate with the postmodern language, the letter was written to all believing Christians."⁸

John writes "to the seven churches that are in Asia." *Asia* refers to the Roman province of that name; today it is western Turkey. Seven, of course, is the number of completion. To write to seven churches is to write to all churches. John's greeting begins in a way similar to Paul's letter openings: "Grace to you and peace," and it continues with a three-point formula.⁹

- Knowable, not fictional – Real
- Normal, not exceptional – every church is like these churches

B. WHAT (v. 4a)

a. "Grace and Peace."

"The heart of John's message for those primitive Christians (and, by extension, for us) is found in the benediction/greeting from the Triune God. 'Grace and peace to you....' Whatever we do with the numbers and the pictures and the rest of what follows, **we must remember that the entire letter is intended to bring those two gifts to these suffering Christians.** That they were suffering is clear from the verse right after our reading: 'I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus....'"¹⁰

"In reading this letter, listeners must hear the voice of God speaking into their lives in ways that are comforting to their ears. **The greeting of grace and peace informs Christians that their peace is not found in the language of the Empire but rather in the *Pax Dei* or the peace of God.** Revelation is a book charged with Godly language and the author deploys vivid imagery **whose goal is to persuade Christ believers in Asia Minor and those around the world to avoid devotion to any cosmic imperial powers save that of the raised Jesus Christ,** who is enthroned at the right hand of God and now speaks to the Church [global]. In faith and worship, the worshippers share Christ's victory, which is the harbinger of authentic peace. In the context of Revelation, the result of grace is peace whereby the walls of hostility are broken and worshippers see themselves as belonging to a new world view ruled by God, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **In an oppressed and hostile situation, peace is the presence of wholeness in and around social relations. Peace signals a longing for a God who will usher in the messianic world of justice and reconciliation. Where there is grace, there is peace and where there is peace, there is also evidence of God's gospel.**"¹¹

"These verses are the key that unlocks the mysterious book of Revelation. I know, that sounds like an overstatement; every "expert" thinks he or she knows the secret of this book. But I'm not talking about any secret. I'm talking about the simple facts presented in these opening words: "John, to the seven churches of Asia." **These words remind us that this book is not first of all some theological tome designed for 21st century Christians in America. This is a pastoral letter from a man so well known that he didn't even have to identify which John he was.** And it was addressed to 7 little churches in 1st century Asia (Minor). Whatever we make of what

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follows in the body of the letter, we must always begin with these simple facts and ask what message Pastor John was sending to those primitive Christians."¹²

"Because Revelation is a letter to Christians struggling to survive, we should be especially alert to survivalist talk on the fringes of today's church. The headline said, "Mormon Apocalypse Prediction Has People Stocking Up On Food." The attending article from the Salt Lake Tribune dated September 13 said the following: "Sales of freeze dried food, flashlights, blankets, and tents have soared in recent weeks as some Mormons have begun to prepare for the end of the world. The so-called 'preppers' believe the world is ending this month based on biblical prophecies, the Hebrew calendar, an unstable economy, world politics, and astronomical occurrences." So, what you need when the Apocalypse is about to happen is blankets and dried beans? Contrast that with John's simply profound, "Grace and Peace to you."¹³

C. FROM WHOM (v. 4c -5a)

a. John (v. 4a)

"What readers may ask is the question about John's role in trying to elucidate the purpose of Revelation. **First**, John is a pastor to all the congregations in Asia Minor and he sends this message for pastoral purposes. **Second**, John is "faithful witness," (cf. v. 9) which means he witnesses to all what God has done in Jesus Christ and John does this even with his entire life as a public testimony. Legally, witnessing means that the one speaking saw and experienced what really happened and John takes a stand for the truth of the Gospel and against the falsehood, lies, and evils of the Empire. Christians have used the word "testimony," in a very casual manner and readers of Revelation can learn much from John on what this concepts means in one's journey of faith."¹⁴

There are several "John's" in the New Testament. Many would suggest this "John" is the same who wrote the Gospel of John and the Letters from John. Others would suggest the "John" of the Revelation is not the same one as the author of the Gospel and the Letters. Regardless, the author of this Letter is "John" and ultimately God.

b. God the Father ("from Him. . ." [v. 4b {"book ends" vv. 4b w/ v. 8}])

"Note the exalted language he uses for God. By referring to God as "him who is (a direct allusion to "I Am Who I Am") and who was (before anything else was, from all eternity) and who is to come (into the far reaches of any future you can imagine, to all eternity)," John emphasizes the utter transcendence of God. **What happens in time cannot change God; thus, grace and peace are assured.** In the words that follow, **John emphasizes the immanence of God.** In Jesus Christ, God was with us as "the faithful witness," telling us the whole truth about God and his will for us, as "the firstborn from the dead," proving that even death cannot rob us of grace and peace, and as "the ruler of the kings of the earth," assuring us that God in the flesh is sovereign over all human sovereigns, even Caesar."¹⁵

c. From the Seven Spirits (v. 4c)

I cannot see how this is anyone other than the Holy Spirit in light of context that is preceded by the Father and ending with the Son.

“Imagery and metaphor dominates in the book of Revelation and in particular, John uses the metaphor of sevens to signify or describe the nature of the Holy Spirit. **In chapter Revelation 1:4, the seven spirits are a reference to the fullness of the Holy Spirit before God’s throne. Ministers of the Word must pay particular attention to the role, place, and function of the Holy Spirit in Revelation and to loose sight of that is to miss the meaning of this book.** John uses the dynamic imagery of the Holy Spirit to stress the active presence and power of the Spirit in and among the congregation’s seven congregations of Asia Minor and consequently the presence and power of the same Spirit in the Church [global]. Both the “Lion of the tribe of Judah,” and the Spirit are given central place, role and function in the book of Revelation and these two aspects of the trinity have authority over creation’s destiny. In relation to God the Father, Jesus Christ through his life, death, and Resurrection is the main source of grace, peace, and life (Revelation 1:5).”¹⁶

d. From Jesus (vv. 5-8)

- i. Who He is
- ii. What He did
- iii. Who we are

“John’s bracing benediction is immediately followed by a dramatic doxology to Christ the King. In the process of praising Jesus, John uses phrases designed to build our faith and hope. He “loves us,” present tense, continuative, all the time. He has freed us from our sins by his blood; this is a done deal, in the past. Thus, it is an unshakeable reality of life. And this loving King has made us to be a kingdom and priests. We may feel like unimportant peons under the thumb of the powers that be, but we are, in fact, royalty.”¹⁷

Whatever else we read in chapters 2 and 3 concerning His church, this thought and theology form the unshakeable underpinnings that no amount of assault by the serpent and his minions can undermine.

II. A Doxology to Christ (vv. 5b-6).

“The rest of verse 5 and all of verse 6 are a doxology (ascribing glory, the Greek *doxa*) to Christ. Jesus is glorified because:

- he loves us (the way Revelation is often read the love of God in Christ can easily be lost);
- he freed or released us from our sins by his blood (in Revelation Jesus is always the slaughtered Lamb who died for us);
- he made us to be a kingdom and priests (that is, he made believers a kingdom, each member is a priest to God; these are ancient privileges of Israel; see Exodus 19:6).”¹⁸

“The Revelation lesson gives us an opening to talk about **Christology** in ways we may not have had. All or any one of the many titles of verse 5 could be explored. **Taken together they outline a full Christology that includes life, death, resurrection, and present lordship.** The Christological emphasis continues with the love of Christ and his freeing action by means of his death (verses 5b-6), and in verse 7 we look forward to the coming of Jesus as the final judge.”¹⁹

“The real definition of God which controls John's understanding is the one we find in Jesus. Jesus gives us the shape of God. He is the witness (1:5). The Greek word also came to mean "martyr". Jesus is both witness and martyr. He is "faithful", another way of saying that we can trust what we see, especially what we see about God. This is an affirmation of Christian faith. "Firstborn from the dead": and "ruler of the kings of the earth" draws on Psalm 89:27, according to which God promises to make the king of Israel, his "firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth." Christians took over this idea and applied it to Jesus, when they celebrated him as Israel's Messiah (= Christ = Anointed King). "Firstborn" belongs to the ancient notion that the king was adopted as God's son. "You are my son; today I have begotten you" were words spoken to a king at his coronation (see Psalm 2). Christians came to interpret the resurrection of Jesus as a coronation in which God appointed Jesus as his son in this sense (see Heb 1:4-6; Rom 1:2-4; Acts 2:36). This is its sense here. The king whom Israel hoped for would be superior to all others, as a firstborn son had preference in handling his father's estate. Christians saw that honour bestowed on Jesus. It fitted all the more neatly because Jesus was the first to be raised from the dead - first "born" from the dead. **The elaborate imagery about Jesus comes from the world of courts and kings, and the rituals which accompanied them. It was a way of saying: God has underlined that this Jesus really was the valid exponent of what God's being and doing, his going and his coming, are about.**”²⁰

- a. His Person
 - i. The faithful witness

“Revelation also identifies Jesus with his followers, and in ways that resonate well beyond this passage. For example, Revelation 1:5 identifies Jesus as “the faithful witness.” After all, Jesus demonstrated his faithful testimony to the point of death. Yet Revelation also calls believers to be faithful to the point of death (2:10), even pointing to a particular believer, Antipas, whose martyrdom meets that standard (2:13). By identifying Jesus as a faithful witness and as “firstborn of the dead,” **Revelation ties Jesus’ glorious reign to his most inglorious death.** If Jesus reigns through his faithfulness, so will his followers inherit his kingdom through their own faithful testimony (12:11).”²¹

- ii. The firstborn of the dead
 - iii. The ruler of the kings of the earth

“Revelation unites the rule of Christ with the status of believers, and it does so in fascinating ways. Within this passage itself, we encounter Jesus as “the faithful witness,” “the firstborn from the dead,” and “the ruler of the kings of the earth.” **Christ’s identity as king directly shapes the identity of his followers.** Loved by and freed from their sins by Jesus, believers form his

kingdom, in which they enjoy the exalted status of priests. His people serve within this “kingdom,” where Jesus enjoys “glory and dominion” forever.”²²

“Preachers might note how this passage connects Jesus’ exalted status with that of God. All the high-flying language we encounter here ultimately points back to God. Yet Revelation has ways of blurring the identity of Jesus with that of God, indeed suggesting a very high Christology. The passage begins with a blessing from the one who sits on the throne, and it concludes with the Lord God proclaiming, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (1:8). Remarkably, this Alpha and Omega passage returns at the end of Revelation, apparently applying once to the one on the throne (21:6) but once to Jesus himself (22:13). Moreover, Revelation 7:9 portrays a multitude standing “before the throne and before the Lamb,” thus linking the Lamb’s authority with God’s. While Revelation’s throne language usually applies to God, Revelation 7:17 identifies the Lamb “at the center of the throne.” Indeed, Revelation 1:8 identifies God as the “Almighty,” in Greek the *Pantokrator*. Jesus as Pantocrator represents a prominent subject for Eastern iconography.”²³

b. His Passion

i. To Him who loves us [this is grace].

See further:

⁶“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. ⁹Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments; ¹⁰but repays those who hate Him to their faces, to destroy them; He will not delay with him who hates Him, He will repay him to his face” (Deut. 7:6-10).

³¹ “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? ³³ Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ Just as it is written, ‘FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED.’ ³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:31-36).

“Stuff” like this must never “get old” for us. God loves us. His love moved Him to act in our behalf.

c. His Provision

i. To Him **who released** us from our sins by His blood [this is peace].

- “And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; **for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation**” (Rev. 5:9).
- “I said to him, ‘My lord, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, **and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb**’” (Rev. 7:14).
- “**And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony**, and they did not love their life even when faced with death” (Rev. 12:11).
- “**He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood**, and His name is called The Word of God” (Rev. 19:13).

“The strong echoes of Old Testament language and ideas continue in 1:6, as John takes up Exodus 19:6, which spoke of Israel as called to be a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. John sees this coming to fulfilment in a community which brings honour and praise to God. It is an image of worship.”²⁴

“Further, we occupy not just **a position of privilege** in the world because we are a **kingdom**; we also occupy **a position of great responsibility**, because we are **priests** in the world. We are here to serve the God and Father of Jesus by representing a sinful humanity before a holy God. Jesus is the great High Priest, as we saw in Hebrews. But Jesus has made us his earthly representatives, entrusted with the task of making disciples for Jesus in all nations. In his love Christ the King has changed everything for us. “To him be glory forever and ever.”²⁵

ii. To Him **who has made** us to be a kingdom

iii. To Him **who has made** us to be priests to His God

d. His People [“Who are we?”]

i. Released / We have freedom

ii. Kingdom / We have identity

iii. Priests / We have access

- Why, in their historical context, is this important to know?
- His people are not displaced, desolate, or deserted. His people are free, home, and welcomed.
- To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever, AMEN.

We go from this towering doxology to a welcoming prophecy.

“Lest those 7 little churches miss his message, John follows his benediction from the Triune God and his doxology to Christ the King with a prophecy about that King. “Look, he is coming with the clouds....” That little word “look” (*idou* in Greek, meaning, “look, see, behold”) is central to Revelation. **This letter is all about seeing what we usually cannot see, namely, Christ the King.**”²⁶

III. A Prophecy about Christ (v. 7).

“Verse 7 provides the first overarching theme of the book: Jesus will return. The first theme is one we automatically associate with Revelation, and John concludes it with a bilingual double-whammy: "So it is to be" (the Greek word *yes*), and "Amen" (the Hebrew for *let it be so*).”²⁷

Again, why is this thought or theme so vital to those first century Christians and to all Christians throughout the ages?

“The Battle of Allatoona Pass was fought in Bartow County, Georgia, on October 5, 1864. It was signals sent before the first gun was fired, however, that inspired one of America's most beloved Christian hymns. "Hold the Fort!" was written in 1870 by Philip Paul Bliss, an evangelist and composer, after he heard the story of the Union defense of Allatoona Pass told in a Sunday School class. The use of signal flags to send messages from Kennesaw Mountain near Atlanta to the threatened garrison holding Allatoona Pass was held forth as an example of how Jesus Christ signals Christians to hold strong to their beliefs, for "He is coming." The meeting attended by Bliss took place in Rockford, Illinois, on a Thursday and Friday, April 28-29, 1870. Among the speakers was Major Daniel Webster Whittle, who told how on the day before the battle, General William Tecumseh Sherman had sent messages by signal flag to urge the garrison at Allatoona to hold out. Whittle remembered the message as saying, "Hold the Fort; I am coming!" His telling of the story so inspired Bliss that he based a hymn on the story of Allatoona Pass:”²⁸

*Ho, my comrades, see the signal, Waving in the sky!
Reinforcements now appearing, Victory is nigh.*

*"Hold the fort, for I am coming," Jesus signals still;
Wave the answer back to heaven, By thy grace we will."*

*See the mighty host advancing, Satan leading on,
Mighty men around us falling, Courage almost gone!*

*"Hold the fort, for I am coming," Jesus signals still;
Wave the answer back to heaven, By thy grace we will."*

*See the glorious banner waving, Hear the trumpet blow!
In our Leader's name we'll triumph, Over every foe.*

*"Hold the fort, for I am coming," Jesus signals still;
Wave the answer back to heaven, By thy grace we will."*

*Fierce and long the battle rages, But our help is near,
Onward comes our great Commander, Cheer, my comrades, cheer.*

*"Hold the fort, for I am coming," Jesus signals still;
Wave the answer back to heaven, By thy grace we will."*

Let me suggest to us that this is the response God the Spirit is looking for when He gives us this welcoming prophecy.

"In 1:7 the author continues to draw on Old Testament texts, this time more directly. He cites both Daniel 7:13 and Zech 12:10. The former influenced Christian statements about Jesus as the coming Son of Man. The latter will have influenced the account of Jesus' death in the fourth gospel, which alone refers to a soldier spearing Jesus' body. Perhaps at some stage (and probably still in Revelation) it was a general reference to the Jewish leaders' rejection of Jesus and his crucifixion, rather than to a particular act. Here the focus is on all peoples and their acknowledgement of who Jesus is. Zechariah 12:10 goes on to say that the people will mourn over the pierced one as over a firstborn son. John may have had the allusion to "firstborn" in mind. His careful but complex formulation is really seeking to indicate that all people will eventually come to see who Jesus was and bemoan their rejection of him. Later we shall see that there is a motif of vengeance behind his stance."²⁹

- Zechariah 12:10
"I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn" (Zech. 12:10).
- John 19:34-37
³⁴ "But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. ³⁵ And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe. ³⁶ For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, 'NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN.' ³⁷ And again another Scripture says, 'THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED'" (John 19:34-37).

Notice how prominent clouds are as it relates to God.

- ¹³ "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. ¹⁴ And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:13, 14).
- ²⁹ "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰ And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:29, 30).
- ⁹ "And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. ¹¹ They also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven'" (Acts 1:9-11).

- Clouds appear to be means of transportation (Rev. 1:7; 10:1; 11:12; 14:14-16).
- **ALREADY / NOT YET**
- 2nd COMING
 1. When Jesus returns He will be accompanied by clouds.
 2. Jews and Gentiles will see Him.
 3. His presence solicits mourning.
 4. This scene is consistent with The Feast of Trumpets and The Day of Atonement.

IV. A Mark of the Divine Author (v. 8).

Verses 1 and 8 almost work as bookends attempting to contain the flood waters present in our text.

“Verse 8 gives us the second overarching theme: God is God. Perhaps that is not so obvious a theme, but **the constant battle in Revelation is between the true God,** the God of Israel, the God of Jesus, **and the false gods of this world epitomized in the emperor of Rome.** In contrast to the false gods, the Lord, the one again ‘who is and who was and who is to come,’ is the Alpha and the Omega. Alpha, of course, was the first letter of the Greek alphabet; Omega was the last letter. In a sense, God is before the beginning and after the end. Moreover, this God is the Almighty, the All-Powerful One. It is a title claimed by the emperor--as are Lord and God. ‘Here,’ writes John, ‘is God. Beside him there is no other.’ And so preachers may well want to ask, ‘Who are the gods attracting people today? And what does the true God say to us about them?’”³⁰

“In 1:8 we are back with the formulation of 1:4 except for two expansions. The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet indicate that God is all encompassing. The final designation, “ruler of all” (*pantokrator*), was a favoured designation of God - like “Almighty”. **In the beginning: God; in the end: God; in the midst of life: God. These are less statements about time and place as they are statements of hope and trust.** That hope and trust are then defined with reference to Jesus. What kind of God is this? The designations were not uncommon in religions of the day and still find their echoes in many religious communities, Christian and otherwise. They are sitting here beside very Jewish ones and particularly beside a quite specific Jewish image of messiahship. They also sit within a frame of honouring which takes kingly courts as models (as did temples). Can we identify with what is happening in this language? Can we re-say it? Does it matter? For John it is the secret of grace and peace for our world.”³¹

The Greek word [*pantokrator*] occurs several times in Revelation, and only once in the rest of the New Testament [in 2 Cor. 6:18, in an Old Testament quote.] The word means ‘ruler over everything’. In the Old Testament, the concept of God as ‘the Almighty’ is expressed frequently - where it means Lord ‘of hosts’ or Lord ‘of the armies’. **It refers to the incredible and**

unsurpassable power of God, and His authority to summon and enlist in the aid of His purpose and His people whatever resources and means He chooses.

Shepherding the Sheep: (What is the NEXT STEP?)

“What then are the lessons of Revelation 1:4-8 and what are readers called to do in terms of appropriation of the message? **The first lesson is** in verses Revelation 1:5-6 where Jesus is praised for three roles: “Loving, freeing, and made us.” These are not just words but they refer to God’s disclosure of love expressed in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus. Revelation is about God’s love to all humanity and its entire creation. **The other lesson is** that Christ followers are on a journey and along this journey; they will encounter other Neros (the dragon and beast in the form of cancer, death, hunger, wars, terrorism, and HIV/AIDS) and will be tested with idolatry imageries. At times they will be tempted to settle for mediocrity or compromise with globalism but with faith and trust in God, the Lamp will lead them into the New Jerusalem -- or a place where God dwells. **Above all,** God is in absolute control of all things and this same God has the first and final word in creation.”³²

“I believe it is essential to take account of Revelation’s context when preaching this passage. In addition to Revelation’s desire for vengeance, modern hearers may struggle with the language of kings and kingdoms. To quote Boesak again, “**Apocalyptic works reflect in the most dramatic way the response of the people of God to the pressures of their time**” (17). Revelation’s audience knows all about kings and kingdoms -- or emperors and empires -- which they consider a mortal threat. Condemnation of the Roman empire, its ruler, and its practices permeates the Apocalypse. John describes the empire as beastly because it blends idolatry with domination (chapter 13), and he characterizes it as a prostitute (a disturbing image) because it so effectively turned diplomacy into economic exploitation (chapters 17-18). In contrast to empires that dehumanize, dominate, and exploit, Revelation offers a king who actually raises the status of his followers. Was Bob Dylan correct in his assessment that “You gotta serve somebody”? **Ancient people could imagine no alternative. Modern believers are wise to take that testimony seriously. In proclaiming Christ as a king whose very blood creates a new kingdom of priests, Revelation imagines an alternative to the powers that lay claim upon us. Christ’s lordship judges all other would-be authorities. It also marks Christ’s followers as holy people within a new community.**”³³

“**Whatever we do with the pictures that follow** the individual letters to the 7 churches in chapters 2 and 3, we must always keep in mind these opening few words. Whoever the Beasts may be, whenever all this takes place, however we interpret the numbers that dot the letter, whatever we make of the 1000 years, John has relayed this series of pictures to give these persecuted Christians the **grace and peace that are rooted in the persons of the Trinity and the work of Christ the King.** We can survive anything if we are sure of that grace and peace.”³⁴

“John Phillips tells the following story, “One of the most stirring pages in English history tells of the conquests and crusades of Richard I, the Lionhearted. While Richard was away trouncing Saladin, his kingdom fell on bad times. His sly and graceless brother, John, usurped all the

prerogatives of the king and misruled the realm. The people of England suffered, longing for the return of the king, and praying that it might be soon. Then one day Richard came. He landed in England and marched straight for his throne. John's castles tumbled like ninepins. Great Richard laid claim to his throne, and none dared stand in his path. The people shouted their delight. They rang peal after peal on the bells. The Lion was back! Long live the king! One day a King greater than Richard will lay claim to a realm greater than England. Those who have abused the earth in His absence, seized His domains, and mismanaged His world will all be swept aside."³⁵

THE TEXT AND ME

Clarity – “AHA”

What draws your attention? What seems important to you?

Question Marks?

What is hard to understand? What do you wish you could ask the author?

Claiming it

What applies personally to your life?

¹ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2825

² <http://apworldromehistory.weebly.com/during-imperial-rule.html>

³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial_cult_\(ancient_Rome\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial_cult_(ancient_Rome))

⁴ <http://www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com/article/opr/t94/e602>

⁵ <https://readingacts.com/2010/04/02/the-roman-cult-of-emperor-worship/> See further Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars*. Translated by K. and R. Gregor Smith. (Philadelphia: The Westminster, 1955). David A. deSilva, “The ‘Image Of The Beast’ And The Christians In Asia Minor: Escalation Of Sectarian Tension In Revelation 13” *TrinJ* 12:2 (Fall 1991) 185-208.

⁶ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=561

⁷ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2825

⁸ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2825

⁹ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=561

¹⁰ http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-29b/?type=lectionary_epistle

¹¹ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2825

¹² http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-29b/?type=lectionary_epistle

¹³ <http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/resources/advent-2015/>

¹⁴ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2825

¹⁵ http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-29b/?type=lectionary_epistle

¹⁶ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2825

¹⁷ http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-29b/?type=lectionary_epistle

¹⁸ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=561

¹⁹ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=561

²⁰ <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/BEpChristtheKing.htm>

²¹ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2683

²² http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2683

²³ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2683

²⁴ <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/BEpChristtheKing.htm>

²⁵ http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-29b/?type=lectionary_epistle

²⁶ http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-29b/?type=lectionary_epistle

²⁷ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=561

²⁸ <http://www.exploresouthernhistory.com/Allatoona2.html>

²⁹ <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/BEpChristtheKing.htm>

Revelation 1:4-8

³⁰ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=561

³¹ <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/BEpChristtheKing.htm>

³² http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2825

³³ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2683

³⁴ http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-29b/?type=lectionary_epistle

³⁵ http://www.sermonnotebook.org/revelation/Revelation%201_4-8.htm Exploring Revelation, rev. ed. [Chicago: Moody, 1987; reprint, Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1991], 22-23