

## *To God Alone Be The Glory*

You know, if Judgment Day would start right now, we could all rush outside and see what our Epistle Lesson promises: CHRIST, THE GLORIOUS KING, RETURNS. In order to help his servants remain ready and waiting for his return, Jesus had the Holy Spirit reveal the Book of Revelation through the Apostle John. Let's consider how these four and a half verses tie in with the rest of Holy Scripture. What a great way to remain ready and waiting for Christ, the glorious King to return!

*<sup>4</sup>Grace and peace to you from Him Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come, and from the seven spirits before His throne, <sup>5</sup>and from Jesus Christ, who is the Faithful Witness, the Firstborn from the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth.*

Many Lutheran pastors like to say, "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," before every sermon. These are such important words that the apostle Paul began all thirteen of his epistles with a form of them. **Grace** (from the Greek word *charis*) summarizes all the gifts of love that come to us through Jesus Christ. So if someone ever blesses you with the words "grace to you," they are saying, "May your life be full of the wonderful gifts with which God graciously adorns the lives of sinners for Jesus' sake." Grace to you.

Peace to you too. **Peace** (from the Greek word *irene*, or from the Hebrew word *shalom*) sums up all the blessings that are yours as a result of God's grace. Blessings such as i) Peace with God rather than the war we started by sinning against him, ii) Peace for our troubled conscience, instead of it incessantly hounding us: "You shouldn't have

done that." iii) Peace for our hearts when life throws the terror of our mortality at us.

"There, there. God is still in control. He will bring you safely into His heavenly kingdom." Peace to you.

Ok, but where do this **grace** and **peace** come to us from? Listen. *<sup>4</sup>Grace and peace to you from Him Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come, and from the seven spirits before His throne, <sup>5</sup>and from Jesus Christ, who is the Faithful Witness, the Firstborn from the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth.* If you said, "That sounds like the Triune God," give yourself an imaginary pat on the back.

But let's take a closer look: *Grace and peace to you from the Father*, that is, from 1) *him* a) *who is*, b) *who was*, c) *who is to come*. If you love grammar, the Holy Spirit left you a treat here. The grammar is purposely abnormal so we can learn something about the Father. If you were to translate this part of the verse literally, it would sound like this: *Grace and peace to you from a) the-He-Who-Is-Being, and b) the He-Was, and c) the He-Who-Is-Coming.* Now why did the Holy Spirit have John write it down that way? Might he want us to think of the Father's eternalness? If the Father is, was, and will be, when is there ever a time when he is not? [whispering] Never. This bad grammar is a great way to capture a sliver of eternity in our three verb tenses (past, present, future).

Oh, but what if the Holy Spirit is hinting at God's unchanging-ness by his bad grammar? The Greek words here describing the Father didn't change case like they were supposed to, not even to become the object of the preposition "from." The words are just like God. He doesn't change either. What a comfort! Everything else is constantly

changing. Much of the new clothing available today seems to wear out quickly. Cars last a lot longer than they used to, but they still break down. Something may give you joy one week but not the next. Even our feelings for those we're supposed to love can change. But even if our love remains constant, sooner or later our loved ones leave our lives. "Change and decay in all around I see." But our heavenly Father never changes, not in his commitment to love us, or care for us, or keep us safe, or connect us to him by his Word. *Grace and peace to you from him who is and who was and who is to come.*

But wait. There's more. *Grace and peace to you also from 2) the seven Spirits which are before the throne.* Why the Holy Spirit chose to reveal himself as "*the seven Spirits*" is never clearly spelled out anywhere in the book of Revelation. Since Revelation relies heavily on so many other parts of the Bible, the Holy Spirit may be trying to remind us of the seven-fold description he revealed about himself in the Book of Isaiah (11:2). There he is described as a) the Spirit of the Lord. He proceeds from the Father and the Son. He is b) the Spirit of wisdom. He makes us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. He is c) the Spirit of understanding: he gives us insight into God's message and helps us apply his truths to our lives. He is d) the Spirit of counsel. Before Jesus suffered and died, he promised to send the Counselor, the Holy Spirit. He is e) the Spirit of might. Just because the Holy Spirit is usually mentioned last doesn't mean he's less powerful than the Father or the Son. It's a good thing the Holy Spirit has so much might—our sinful flesh makes us humans difficult to convert from unbelief. He is f) the Spirit of knowledge. He revealed God's messages to the prophets and apostles. Without his work, we wouldn't know enough about our God to be saved. He

is g) the Spirit of the fear of the Lord. He works respect in us so we want to follow God's will. *Grace and peace to you from the seven Spirits of God.*

But wait. There's more. *Grace and peace to you also from 3) Jesus Christ.* The Holy Spirit calls Jesus a) the faithful witness. Remember today's Gospel Lesson? Jesus said, "I came to testify to the truth." The words for "testify" and "witness" derive from the same Greek root. 'Testifying' and 'witnessing to the truth' is the same thing that the prophets did when they took God's messages to God's people. Calling Jesus the faithful witness reminds us of his function as our **Prophet**.

Then the Holy Spirit calls Jesus b) *the firstborn from the dead*. Tell me again: why did Jesus die on the cross? He sacrificed himself to take the punishment for our sins. Sacrifice. That word is always associated with the office of **Priest**. Our Priest offered himself as the sacrifice, which killed him. But when Jesus rose from the dead, that was like the Father saying he accepted Jesus' death as payment in full for all sin (see Romans 4:25).

So we've got Jesus as Prophet. We've got Jesus as Priest. You know what's coming next. The Holy Spirit describes him as c) *the ruler of the kings of the earth*. Ah, yes, Jesus is our **King**. He keeps us safe like a good king should. A king rules, yes, but this king rules all other rulers, even when they don't know it, and he uses them to carry out his divine purposes. Can you see where the Lord might use the activities of Isis and Al Qaeda to remind people, "Life is short. You're going to have to face God when you die. Are you sure you're good enough to stand before him

on your own? Or do you need the help of the Savior, dear sinner?”

I wish everyone could hear all this good news about grace and peace from our triune God. It might lead them to praise our Savior. It led John to do so. *To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, <sup>6</sup>and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father—to Him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.*

Did you notice? There was yet another “three” in those words—the three reasons to praise Jesus. He is A) him who loves us. Present tense. Whenever you want to express an action that keeps on happening, you naturally use the present tense. Jesus loves us. His love never wavers—not even when we turn away from him for a time and he must send us trouble to bring us back. Jesus’ love for us never wavers. You can count on Jesus. That’s one reason to praise Jesus.

Here’s another. He B) *has freed us from our sins by his blood.* Notice here the past tense is used. He doesn’t leave us hanging in the balance: “Maybe we’ll get free and maybe we won’t.” No, the freeing has already taken place. It is finished. Jesus paid our debt with his holy, precious blood. It’s not just that the check’s in the mail. It’s not just that you can take it to the bank. No, the check’s already cleared. It’s your account. He has freed us from our sins by his blood. That’s a second reason to praise Jesus.

Here’s a third. He C) *has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God.* It wasn’t enough for Jesus to set us free from punishment in hell someday. So Jesus gave us all an exalted position now. He has made us his kingdom. We believers are a royal

house of kings and queens. We rule with him now because he listens to our prayers and shapes the future accordingly.

Have you filled up on blessings yet? Jesus didn’t think so. He has also made all of us priests. In the Old Testament the people could not take their offerings directly to the Lord. They had to use an intermediary, a priest. In New Testament times Jesus has done away with all that. You now have the right to approach God directly, on your own behalf, and on behalf of others. You get to be an intermediary, especially for unbelievers. You get to pray for them. How many unbelievers are going to be brought to faith in Jesus because you are praying for them?

Of course, we aren’t the first people God said he was making into a kingdom of priests. He said this about the children of Israel too. Think about that. He refers to his Old Testament people as a kingdom of priests, and he calls us New Testament believers his kingdom and priests. Could he be trying to teach us that the New Testament Church is the “Israel of God”? Are we the New Testament children of Israel? [whispering] Yes.

Jesus made us a kingdom, and priests to serve his God and Father. “Wait. The Father is Jesus’ God? Isn’t Jesus God already? Why does he need the Father to be his God?” The Holy Spirit seems to be pointing our attention to the two natures in Christ. According to Jesus’ human nature, the Father is his God. According to Jesus’ divine nature, God is his Father—they have a special relationship that many of us know something about if we had a great relationship with our earthly father.

To the one who loves us and freed us, and

made us a kingdom of priests—to him be glory and power forever and ever. “Is that a wish or a fact?” Why can’t it be both? We wish our Savior to receive glory because of what he did for us. But glory and power belong to him whether we wish it or not. And when he returns, everyone will see it!

In fact that’s what the next verse says. <sup>7</sup>*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. Coming with the clouds, just the way he left when he ascended into heaven. Every eye will see him.* I wonder how Jesus will make himself seen everywhere in the world when the earth is round? How can we see him here if he comes back on the clouds over India? I don’t know, but he must be powerful, because no matter what part of the world we live in, we’ll see him.

*Even those who pierced him.* “Oh, those poor soldiers who pierced Jesus when they crucified him. I would not want to be them.” But are they the only ones referred to here? Lots of people have hated what Jesus stands for. What’s the difference between ‘refusing to listen to what God’s Word teaches about Jesus’ and ‘actually nailing Jesus to the cross’? This is why all the peoples of the earth who don’t believe in Jesus as their Savior will mourn when he returns.

But we won’t mourn. We believers are no longer “*the people of the earth.*” We are God’s people through faith in Jesus. We will greet Judgment Day with great rejoicing, not mourning. *So shall it be! Amen.*

Now listen to Christ our King identify himself. <sup>8</sup>*“I am the Alpha and the Omega,”*

*says the Lord God, “Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come, the Almighty.”* Now wait a minute. Is this Jesus talking or the Father? At the beginning of our text, the **Father** was identified as *the One who is, was, and is to come.* How can this be Jesus? Well, Jesus IS like the Father in every way that he is God. The last chapter of Revelation also helps us identify Jesus here. There Jesus says, “*Behold I am coming soon... I am the Alpha and the Omega... I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony*” (22:12,13,16). Ah, so this verse in the first chapter is talking about Jesus.

Ok, but why does Jesus call himself “the Alpha and the Omega”? You probably know that alpha is first letter in the Greek alphabet, and omega is the last letter in the Greek alphabet. So this is like Jesus saying, “I am the first and the last, the beginning and end. No one came before me and no one will exist after me. I am eternal.” Hmmm. Only God is eternal. So Jesus must truly be God. In fact this verse calls him “*Lord God.*” So not just the Father, but Jesus also is the one who was and who is and who is to come. Again, Jesus is eternal!

And he is *the Almighty!* Yes, the same Jesus who allowed himself to be nailed to the cross so we wouldn’t have to suffer for sin... The same Jesus who was so dead that they had to carry his body to the grave—he is the Almighty! He promised to return and bring salvation to all who hope in him. He can do it. And he will.

Even so, Lord Jesus, quickly come.