

To God Alone Be The Glory

In one of his books Philip Yancey imagines a society where no one believes there is a heaven or a hell. He names his fictitious land Acirema. Everyone there hates the idea of growing old and dying. Since without heaven no one has any real hope for the future, the Aciremans put great emphasis on “preserving youth.” Life is lived for today. Old age is somewhat shunned and devalued. In fact, many people live in denial of their aging. Appearances are all that matters. They spend large sums on cosmetics and chemical treatments to slow down the aging process, or at least appear to. They are not interested in inner beauty, integrity, or compassion. Aciremans who are not attractive, young, and healthy face subtle discrimination. Acireman scientists try to figure out how to eliminate death. Spirituality for the Aciremans consists of philosophies to help people feel good for the here and now. So Aciremans either try to build up riches, or they do whatever they think will make them happy right now.

Does any of this sound familiar? It’s actually a description of our society. Perhaps you figured out that Acirema spells America backwards. Much of America seems to live as if the resurrection of Jesus doesn’t have anything to do with how we live our lives. How about us? Do we sometimes act like ‘how we live’ has no connection to ‘Jesus’ resurrection’? What a blessing that Easter lasts for a whole season of the church year! It’s too important to celebrate just once. With the help of the Holy Spirit, let’s focus on this reading from

Revelation and see that THE RISEN JESUS IS ALWAYS WITH US.

Another fine translation reads: *‘I, John, your fellow Christian and one who shares with you in suffering and ruling and patiently enduring in Jesus...’* This same John also wrote a Gospel and 3 Epistles. He was a leader in the early church. He could have introduced himself as a bigshot Apostle of Christ, but John had learned to be a humble servant-leader from Jesus himself. Besides, John shared an important bond with his readers: like John, many of the Christians in Asia Minor were suffering because of their faith in Jesus.

What a nice surprise to hear John point out that he also shares with his fellow believers in ruling. The Greek word for “ruling” can be translated kingdom, as in, “*Repent for the kingdom of God is near*” (what Jesus regularly proclaimed). But if we translate the word as ‘ruling,’ the Greek word brings out the truth that ‘the kingdom of God’ is really ‘the ruling activity of God.’ What a great thing for John to remind the suffering Christians of: the risen Jesus rules over all things in heaven and on earth for their benefit. Even if we were persecuted by our government, that would not change the truth which the Bible is teaching here: we are partners with Jesus in his ruling activity. How? By our prayers for those in authority, by our petitions that God’s will be done, by sharing the good news that Jesus is the Savior. Through such activities, we are participating with Jesus in the process by which he gets to rule in more people’s hearts and save them too. So even if we are struck down, imprisoned, have our land

confiscated, or suffer other indignities because we are associated with Jesus, we are still the actual co-rulers of this world along with almighty Jesus.

John also shares with Christians in the matter of *patiently enduring in Jesus*. It may be hard to relate to John in this. Any persecution we may suffer because we are Christians does not involve us being struck down or imprisoned, or us losing our possessions. We may have lost friends or been spoken against because we spoke up for what God teaches in the Bible. As a congregation, when we proclaim the Bible's teachings, some of our guests may not come back because they cannot reconcile what they've been taught elsewhere with what we are teaching. This makes our hearts ache. Aching hearts are part of sharing with John in the matter of patiently enduring in Jesus.

Let me mention some examples. When people have been taught that they are basically good, it's really hard for them to hear us repeat the Bible's teaching that we are completely sinful in God's eyes. But then when we point out that Jesus' death on the cross fully paid the penalty for all sin, and that we welcome all sinners to come and repent no matter what they've done or left undone, this is hard to accept by anyone who struggles to forgive. Then there are the times that we patiently endure because people are more concerned about the **style** of worship than the substance. Then there are the evil examples that attack us from the screen, with their constant insinuation that the Lord doesn't really exist because he

never holds people accountable for the evil they do. We used to be able to bring up children in a sheltered way so they weren't exposed to wickedness till later on. But now we must patiently endure the task of teaching them how to deal with evil at a young age so that they are not swept away by it.

Everyone who believes in Jesus should expect to suffer, and to rule with Jesus, and to patiently endure. If we have to put up with setbacks from time to time, let's remember that this is all "*in Jesus*." Don't despair. Endure patiently. And keep doing outreach, not because "we want our church to grow," but because people need the Lord. In the end those who have the Lord will win. To the extent we remember we will have the victory, we will patiently endure.

How was John suffering? He *was exiled on the island called Patmos for speaking God's Word and the testimony of Jesus*. The Romans liked Patmos as a place of exile because it was a barren, desolate island in the Aegean Sea. Less than 50 square miles in size (almost 10 miles at longest, 6 at widest), it lies southwest of Ephesus where John lived and worked. The 4th century church historian Eusebius reports that, according to the early church father Irenaeus, John was exiled to Patmos in the 14th year of Domitian's reign (95 A.D.) and that he was released shortly after the emperor's timely demise in 96.

John tells us: ¹⁰*I came under the Spirit's power on the Lord's day, that's Sunday. John found himself in a state of*

heightened spiritual awareness, able to see and hear things which people ordinarily do not see or hear. *I heard a loud voice behind me like a trumpet,* ¹¹saying: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches.” Jesus wants what John writes down to be received by Christians as the Word of God. The seven churches are listed in the order in which a person would visit them: *Ephesus and Smyrna and Pergamum and Thyatira and Sardis and Philadelphia and Laodicea.*

¹²*I turned to see the voice which was talking to me; and when I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands.* These seven lampstands represent the seven churches (according to v. 20). As lamps give light, so Jesus is the Light of the world. When people trust in him, their faith shines like a lighted lamp. Jesus wants our light to shine, to give light to everyone around us. So don't lie to people. Exaggerating can be done for humorous effect, but when a person exaggerates a lot, it comes across as lying. Jesus loves the truth.

I saw ¹³*among the lampstands Someone like a son of man...* This Someone looked like a human. He had hair, eyes, hands, feet. This Someone is Jesus. He is standing among the lampstands because THE RISEN JESUS IS ALWAYS WITH his Church just like he promised (see Matthew 18:20 & 28:20).

Listen to John's 10-part description of the glorified Jesus. **a)** *He was clothed with a robe that reached down to His feet; and*

b) *He wore a golden belt around His chest;* This is how an Old Testament high priest dressed. Jesus is our high priest in heaven. He always lives to intercede for us with the Father.

c) ¹⁴*His head and* **d)** *His hair were white like white wool, like snow...* White usually symbolizes holiness or purity. Here it may also point out that Jesus is ancient. (Micah 5:2 reveals that Jesus' “origins are from of old, from ancient times.”)

e) *His eyes were like flames of fire...* This reminds me of Psalm 34:15-16: “*The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.*” In other words, Jesus can look into the darkest recesses of our hearts and see our troubles. He knows what we need (see Hebrews 4:13).

¹⁵**f)** *His feet were like glowing bronze, refined in a furnace...* In those days feet played an important role in victory. Victors would put their feet on the necks of those they conquered. Jesus has glowing, bronze, powerful feet. Jesus is in charge (see Ephesians 1:22).

g) *His voice was like the sound of many waters...* You hear water only when it is moving. The louder water is, the more powerful it is; think of the ocean or fast-moving flood waters. This voice of Jesus, which sounds like lots of water moving very fast, can either wash **you** away or it can wash **your sins** away. (Another sign of his deity, see Ezekiel 43:2.)

¹⁶**h)** *in His right hand He held seven*

stars... These seven stars represent the seven pastors of those seven churches (see v 20). What a comforting message for those pastors! “I’ve got you in My hand: the Almighty is protecting you! Tell people my message without being afraid.”

i) *out of His mouth came a sharp, double-edged sword...* This sword is the Word of God. The fact that it’s double-edged may refer to the two main doctrines which the Bible teaches: the law and the gospel. (See John 3:36.)

j) *His face was like the sun when it shines in all its brightness.* John already knew that Jesus’ face could shine like the sun. He saw it on the Mount of Transfiguration. This risen Jesus is always with us.

¹⁷*When I saw Him, I fell down at His feet as a dead man* because God’s majesty overwhelms sinful humans. People today might call John a good person, yet John falls down before Jesus here similar to how Adam hid from God in the bushes of the garden (Gen 3:10). It’s only natural for sinful us to have “*a certain fearful expectation of judgment*” (Heb 10:27) if we come into God’s presence with our own goodness.

So Jesus *laid His right hand on me, saying: Stop being afraid!* Holy God has appeared this time to love you not to judge. God’s love in Jesus is the wonderful antidote to our fear. In fact the only good reason to be afraid of the Lord is ‘not being sorry for our sins.’ Jesus doesn’t

want you to be afraid of him, unless, of course, you are holding on to a sin rather than letting it go.

I am the First and the Last... This is Jesus’ way of saying He is eternal (see Isa 44:6). I am ¹⁸*the Living One; and I died, and now you see I am alive forever.* My humiliating death on the cross is past. I am now the ruler of the whole world. Someday I will share my glory with you. Here’s my Easter message: I’m always with you. Keep fighting every temptation Satan sets before you. Keep telling people that I paid for their sins. That’s what I want your life to be about now that I am raised from the dead.

I have the keys of death and of Hades. Having the keys to something means you have authority over it. So Jesus can unlock us from physical death on the Last Day. Then Jesus can lock us out of death so that we never die again. And whether Hades is the place where dead spirits go, or the grave, or hell, ultimately it doesn’t matter because Jesus can deliver us from every aspect of Satan’s power. Even if persecutors chop off our heads or burn our bodies or tie a rock to our feet and drop us in the lake, Jesus can still reach us.

The resurrection of Jesus means Jesus has all power in heaven and on earth. So let’s live like he’s our Lord—let’s do what he commands in his Word, and let’s stop doing whatever he hates. This is how we show that there’s a connection between Jesus’ resurrection and our daily lives.