

See Him Coming With The Clouds ~ Revelation 1:4-18

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ April 12, 2015

Grace and peace to you from him who is, who was, and who is to come, Amen.

Easter has come and gone. All the retail stores have restocked their cards and their candies for the next big holiday. No longer are Easter bunnies roaming the Tucson malls. We're missing a few of the people that joined us last week. For all the world to see, it seems like Easter was a once a year celebration that we can pack away until next year rolls around. But not in the church, at least not in the historical church. I mentioned last week how the meaning of Easter lives on in our lives, and we are reminded about that every Sunday, but the historical church also set aside several weeks after Easter to celebrate Jesus' resurrection.

That's why you'll find on the cover of your worship folder "The Second Sunday of *Easter*." The gospel readings for the next couple weeks will detail some of the events that took place after Jesus' resurrection from the dead. This week we happened to hear about when Jesus appeared to his disciples in the locked upper room. This year, our second lessons will all come from the last book of the Bible – Revelation. Throughout this season of Easter, we will consider each of these lessons from Revelation more closely.

Many people get carried away with all the visions and the prophecies and start making wild claims that Jesus never actually made. There's a reason the book of Revelation finds itself at the back of our Bibles. It's like the last chapter of a book, all the preceding chapters lead up to it. If you jump right in at the last chapter, you'll find yourself lost. But when you remember the basic theme of Revelation, everything else starts to fall into place. That doesn't mean you will understand every detail perfectly, but you can discover how the parts help support the theme. Are you ready for the simple two word theme of Revelation? Jesus Wins!

When we remember that theme, we can start to see how it can all tie in with our season of Easter. Last week we were reminded that Jesus won when he rose from the dead – proving himself stronger than death itself. We see how Revelation elaborates on that point, and how that affects our lives today. Because Easter is more than just about a day, it's about the day when we SEE HIM COMING WITH THE CLOUDS. But before we SEE HIM COMING IN THE CLOUDS, John gives his introduction.

(1)

⁴ John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: 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, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ 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.

John gives a customary greeting that would be common in all of his letters. He uses the words grace and peace. Grace, from the Greek, is God's undeserved love, Peace, from the Hebrew "*Shalom*," is

the way things ought to be. And who is this peace in? None other than our triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We begin to see the wonderful symmetry of “threes” which John employs. Not only does John speak to the Trinity, but who Christ is and the exact work which he has accomplished – **“To him who loves us.”** This is a constant ongoing love which Christ had for us at the beginning and has still for us today. **“To the one who has freed us from our sins by his blood.”** By Christ’s death and resurrection he cancelled our debt in hell. And, **“he has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve God.”**

What is John saying here? He’s saying we have every reason to have confidence in his words and also in our Savior. This was something John himself came to know not only as Jesus’ disciple, but as he continued to preach the message that John gave him. It was his confidence in the almighty, all-powerful God who has already done so much which allowed John to lay his head down on a pillow at night. This is the same God who comes to us today with the same grace and peace.

(2)

“Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.” So shall it be! Amen. ⁸ “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

The first prophecy of Revelation also serves as the guiding words for our Easter season. **“Look, he is coming with the clouds.”** This reminds us that Easter was not just some one-time event that happened 2,000 years ago, but it is an event that matters today. We must constantly be looking for Jesus to return. And he will return exactly as he says. He will return with all the power and glory of heaven at his side. And while it will be a glorious sight for all believers, it will be a frightening sight for those who turned their back on him.

As if there were any doubt as to who this is, John removes it immediately with the first words Jesus speaks, **“I am the Alpha and the Omega’ says the Lord God, ‘who is, who was and who is to come.”** Jesus is the same eternal God as the Father. He was around in the beginning, he will not change, he does not change. This is what gives us confidence that Jesus’ words are just as true now as they were before.

(3)

I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰ On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, ¹¹ which said: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches

After John reminds us of the all-powerful God we worship he tells us his situation. He’s not living in some nice retirement home where he can press a button for his next meal. But he’s been exiled on a small island off the coast of Italy called Patmos. Why? Not because of a violent crime, but because he preached the gospel. Yes, tradition has it that John’s fate in exile was far more kind than the remainder of

the disciples who faced death for their faith, but nevertheless, he was not enjoying the luxuries of life because he believed in Jesus.

But with an all-powerful God on our side, we don't need to fear persecution or pain or suffering, we can still believe and worship him. Which is exactly what John was doing. He was worshiping God on Sunday – the Lord's day, the day the Lord rose from the dead. On that day, God gave to John a special vision. It wasn't just a "hunch" or a "feeling" he got to do something – this was a God vision, a vision to give the early Christian church comfort as they continued to journey through this life towards heaven.

(4)

I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

How majestic was this vision. In this vision he saw his teacher, his friend, his Savior. He saw Jesus. He saw Jesus in all his splendor. You can see a depiction of this on the front cover of your worship folder. The white hair and clothes representing holiness. The eyes like blazing fire which can see into the deepest recesses of the human heart, the sword coming from his mouth depicting the Word of God which judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. His face was shining with all the brightness of the sun. Once before, John had witnessed Jesus in a similar fashion – on the mount of Transfiguration.

While all of the details of the vision may not be readily evident to us, one thing is clear – this same Jesus who endured all the punishment for our sins, who endured the same persecution his followers are enduring, now occupies this position as ruler of the earth. What happened to Jesus, is going to happen to us as well.

(5)

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

We might think such a vision like this would get John all giddy and excited, to see his powerful Lord. And yet, what was the first thing that John did? He fell at his feet as though dead. Why that reaction, especially from a great believer like John, didn't he believe how glorious Jesus was? No, it was precisely because John knew how glorious Jesus is that he fell down at his feet, and I would venture if we were faced with the same vision, we would fall down too. Because God is holy, and we are unholy. Our sin causes us to tremble in the presence of a holy God, even though we know it is a holy God who saves us.

This fear is the result of the sinful nature which does not know the love and grace of God, who sees God only as a fearful judge. And it does not only happen to unbelievers, but believers as well. Why do

you think there are so many times when “Do not be afraid” is used in the New Testament? At the birth of Jesus, the angels spoke this to the shepherds, these were Jesus words to his disciples on a rickety boat in the middle of a stormy sea. These were the words of Jesus when he spoke to his disciples in the upper room on the night of his resurrection. Oh those words would have brought back memories to John. Comforting words, calming words, peaceful words.

It is those calming words of “**Do not be afraid**” that we need to hear as well. “**Do not be afraid,**” if your life isn’t going the way you want it to. “**Do not be afraid**” when it doesn’t seem like the gospel is working, “**Do not be afraid**” that I have forgotten you.

Why should we not be afraid? Because Jesus is in control. He is the one who was dead and now he is alive again. Not only that, but not he holds the keys of death and Hades. Think about what that means. Jesus can unlock that door of death for anyone he chooses. And he has chosen you and me. He has chosen us to believe in him. And because of that, we don’t have to worry about what will happen in this life. We don’t have to worry about how people will respond to the message of the gospel. Instead, we will want to share this message with the world.

There are plenty of reasons why we should consider the book of Revelation in connection with Easter. On Easter, Jesus showed his followers that he was the Messiah who had freed them from their sins. Revelation shows us the final outcome of our faith. It gives us encouragement to fulfill our mission. It gives us encouragement to always live with one eye firmly fixed on the skies. For we look forward to the day when we will SEE HIM COMING WITH THE CLOUDS. Amen.