



**Jonesboro Heights Baptist Church**  
Sanford, North Carolina

Dr. Mark E. Gaskins  
Senior Pastor

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**What Jesus Has Done For Us**  
**Revelation 1:4-8**

Have you ever experienced something so powerful, so incredible, so life-changing that you could never get away from it—something that's stuck with you and still stays fresh on your mind though it happened long ago?

John had. It had been about 65 years since Jesus Christ had walked the earth with his disciples, teaching and preaching the kingdom of God, healing the sick, and casting out demons; 65 years since he was crucified by the Romans at the instigation of the Jewish religious leaders; 65 years since he had risen from the dead and ascended to the Father with the promise that he would return in glory.

But it was all fresh on John's mind as he began to write what we know as the book of Revelation.

We're sure that John wrote Revelation; we're just not certain *which* John. In the early church, some held that it was John the elder, while others held that it was the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee. Tradition holds that of the eleven apostles that remained after Judas' treachery and resulting suicide, all were martyred in some way except John, the son of Zebedee. He lived to a ripe old age and died a natural death, despite at least one attempt to martyr him and later sending him into exile on the island of Patmos. Since the John who wrote Revelation was on the island of Patmos when he received his vision, it's certainly reasonable to assume, in light of this tradition, that he was the Apostle John.

Now the Apostle John was there when Jesus was teaching and preaching the kingdom of God, healing the sick, and casting out demons.

The Gospel that bears his name seems to refer to him as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." According to John's Gospel, he was the only one of the Twelve who was at the cross. He saw Jesus suffer and die. On that first Easter, when Mary Magdalene came and told him and Peter that Jesus' body was not in the tomb, he outran Peter as they hurried to the tomb to see what had happened. And when he went into the tomb and saw how the linen cloths that Jesus' body had been wrapped in were lying there, he believed. Over the next several weeks he saw the risen Jesus face to face time after time as he appeared to his followers.

And now, 65 years later, it was all still fresh on his mind—even more so now as he began to write about this incredible vision he had received from the Lord Jesus.

***The big picture . . .***

John begins the book by identifying it as "the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to

him to show his servants what must soon take place” (1:1a).<sup>1</sup> He says that Jesus sent his angel to make this revelation known to him so that he could testify to everything he had seen in the vision. Then he pronounces a blessing on the one who reads and those who hear and take to heart “the words of this prophecy” (1:3).

Then John begins a letter to the seven churches of Asia—not the only churches in Asia, but the key ones, and churches that he apparently has a relationship with as an authoritative leader. Since Revelation is apocalyptic literature where symbols and numbers are used to convey meaning, addressing these *seven* churches means that the message is for the *whole* church throughout the world as well.

And just as Paul did when he wrote a letter, John takes the elements of an ancient letter and fills them full of *Christian* meaning. The greeting offers “grace and peace,” God’s favor that we can’t earn and the wholeness in our relationship with him and with one another that this grace brings, rather than just the simple “Greetings!” His prayer is a doxology to the risen Lord Jesus for who he is and what he has done for us rather than a simple well-wish. But it’s much more than just that.

Look at how he describes the one the grace and peace come from: “from him who is, and who was, and who is to come . . .” (1:4). He’s referring to God’s eternal nature—he is, he always has been, and he always will be. This is especially true of God as he has revealed himself as the Father.

But this grace and peace aren’t just from the Father; they also come “from the seven spirits before his throne” (1:4). What in the world does that mean? Since in apocalyptic literature the number seven represents fullness and perfection, this would seem to mean the Holy Spirit in all his fullness, especially since this phrase is set alongside the threefold description of the Father as the one “who is, and who was, and who is to come” (1:4).

So it’s no surprise, then, that this grace and peace also come “from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth” (1:5)—also a threefold description that covers Jesus’ earthly life, his death, his resurrection, and his reign.

God’s grace and peace come from the eternal God who reveals himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and who has worked in his Son to bring about his redemptive rule in the world.

That’s the big picture that John gives us in his greeting.

Then he turns to his doxology, this poem of praise that might really be better sung than spoken. In his doxology, John described what Jesus has done for us through his life, death, and resurrection (1:5b-6):

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 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 goes on to give a prophecy about how Jesus will return in glory in v. 7, then in v. 8 he gives an identity statement from the Lord that echoes his greeting:

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.

It's interesting that in Revelation 22:12-13, Jesus declares that he is coming, and claims "the Alpha and the Omega" as a title for himself!

### ***What has Jesus done for us?***

Now sandwiched between John's greeting and description of God and the life, death and reign of Christ on one side and the promise of his return in glory and God's declaration of who he is on the other, we find John's doxology about Jesus and what he has done. In the way that writers wrote in John's day and the literary patterns they used, this is what John was emphasizing!

So what has Jesus done for us? John's doxology tells us that *Jesus loves us, has freed us from our sins, and has made us a kingdom of priests*. Let's think about that together for a minute . . .

This one who is "the faithful witness" (a reference to his complete obedience and his faithfulness to the point of death on the cross—"witness" translates the Greek word that also means "martyr"), "the firstborn from the dead" (a reference to his resurrection as the beginning of the resurrection at the last day), and "the ruler of the kings of the earth" (a reference to his rule as the victorious Messiah)—he is the one who has worked God's redemptive purpose in the world! And here's what he's done.

First, *Jesus loves us*. It's interesting that while John puts the other things he says in the past tense as something the risen Lord Jesus has accomplished, this is in the present tense—he continually *loves us*.

It's the simplest, yet the most profound truth that there is. *Jesus loves us*. And it's not a love that's driven or drawn out of him by something good or lovable in us. The word John uses for love here is the word that describes not affection or attraction, but rather unflinching good will that grows out of the character of the one who is doing the loving. In other words, he loves us because that's his nature, not because we deserve it. In fact, we don't deserve it! Left to ourselves, we at best live ignoring and neglecting God, and at worst live in full rebellion against him. And yet he loves us.

In Romans 5:6-8, Paul marveled at how "at just the right time, Christ died for the ungodly." He reasoned that it's rare for one human being to die for another, and that then it's usually for some exceptionally "good" or righteous person. Then he said, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

And his love continues. Doesn't it amaze us?

In the first half of the twentieth century, one of the greatest theological minds in the world was the Swiss pastor and professor, Karl Barth. The one time that he visited the United States, late in his life, he gave lectures at Princeton Seminary and the University of Chicago. According to a story that's told in several different ways, someone asked him how he would sum up everything he had written or what was his greatest thought or something along those lines. This learned preacher and theologian who had written thousands and thousands of pages of theology through the years paused for a moment, then replied:

Jesus loves me, this I know,  
For the Bible tells me so.

So simple, yet so profound—*Jesus loves us*. And he has demonstrated his love beyond any shadow of a doubt through his life, his death on the cross, and his resurrection!

The second thing: *Jesus has freed us from our sins*, and has done that by his blood. This implies that through his faithfulness to the point of death, Jesus has conquered sin, Satan, and death. It also implies that he has risen, since he has freed us through his blood that he shed for us.

You see, the picture here is that of the redemption of a slave or captive. One way of looking at it is that Jesus has paid the price to set us free. Another way that the early church especially looked at it is that Jesus is the Victor, and because he has conquered sin, he can free those who are its captives. This was one of the major pictures of the atonement in the New Testament and the early church.

Not only does he love us, not only has he freed us; *Jesus has made us a kingdom of priests to his God and Father*. Since he has conquered, he rules. He has made us a kingdom, but not just any kingdom. Rather, we are a kingdom of priests who have access to God with no mediator but Jesus, so that we can come to God ourselves on our own behalf *and* on behalf of others.

This idea is rooted in the Old Testament (Exodus 19:5-6). The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was a major emphasis of the Reformation, and it's been a focal point of a Baptist understanding of the faith.

Being a kingdom of priests means we're under Christ's rule, and we have access to God through him. It also means that we are responsible to serve him in the world, to be priests to each other and to those around us. We're not to be spectators, we're to be involved in God's work in the world. We're to be on mission with Christ, proclaiming the gospel through word and deed.

A practical aside here . . . In any church, and particularly one of our size, it takes the involvement of a lot of people to carry on our ministry and mission. One of the hardest, most thankless jobs in a Baptist church is serving on the Nominating Committee. That group is hard at work in our congregation right now. If the members of Jonesboro Heights Baptist Church took seriously the priesthood of all believers, it wouldn't be a matter of trying to enlist people to serve. There wouldn't have to be any begging or pleading or arm-twisting. This committee's job would be to help put the multitude who are willing to serve in the right roles!

We are *all* priests! We are *all* called to serve! Are *you* willing to serve?

Jesus loves us. He has freed us from our sins. He has made us a kingdom of priests.

Have you trusted him and depended on what he's done to set you right with God?

Have you thanked him for loving you?

Are you living like he's freed you from your sins?

Are you serving him as Lord and as his priest?

Can you get away from what Jesus has done for us? For you?

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 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.

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