

### THREE REASONS FOR THE CHRISTIAN TO BE ENCOURAGED

*1* <sup>4</sup>John, [addressing] the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before his throne, <sup>5</sup>and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the first born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and who released us from our sins by his blood—<sup>6</sup>and caused us to become a kingdom and priests for his God and Father—to him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever!

<sup>7</sup>Look! He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, including those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth shall mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen. <sup>8</sup>I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, [the one] who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

<sup>9</sup>I, John, your brother and a participant with you in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance [that are ours] in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. <sup>10</sup>On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, <sup>11</sup>that said, Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea. <sup>12</sup>I turned around to see the voice that spoke to me. When I turned I saw seven golden lamp stands, <sup>13</sup>and in the midst of the lamp stands was someone like the Son of man, dressed in a robe that reached down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. <sup>14</sup>His head and his hair were as white as white wool, [as white] as snow, and his eyes were like a flame of fire. <sup>15</sup>His feet were like polished bronze, as if it had been refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. <sup>16</sup>In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in its brilliance. <sup>17</sup>When I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead man. But he laid his right hand upon me and said, Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last, <sup>18</sup>I am the Living One. I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades. <sup>19</sup>Now then, write the things you saw, the things that are [now happening], and the things that will happen [in the future]. <sup>20</sup>[With regard to] the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lamp stands: The seven stars represent the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lamp stands represent the seven churches. (Rev. 1:4-20)

#### **Introduction**

Whenever I returned from the post office, having gone to pick up the mail, my two young sons would always ask, "Is there any mail for us?"

We enjoy receiving mail, especially personal correspondence from a friend or relative who lives somewhere far away. When we find such a letter awaiting us at the post office it thrills our heart. Depending on our personality, we do one of two things: either we drop everything else and immediately rip open the envelope; or, we save that personal correspondence for last so that we can truly savor it.

Proverbs 25:25 informs us that just as cold water refreshes a thirsty soul, so also does good news from a distant country. Here at the very beginning of the Book of Revelation we find just such a correspondence—greetings addressed to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ; greetings that come to us from the heavenly fatherland; greetings addressed to us by the Lord Himself. Before revealing the great and awesome events that must take place and that shall usher in the kingdom of God, before addressing the condition of the individual churches with words of counsel or commendation or rebuke, our Lord begins by first conveying His benevolent greeting to the church, a greeting that contains words of assurance and encouragement.

## I. Be Encouraged by Our Lord's Word of Blessing

The Apostle John pronounces the benediction, *"grace and peace to you"* (1:4.) *"Grace"* has been defined as "God's riches at Christ's expense;" a definition that is in accord with this present passage: *"Jesus Christ ... loves us and ... released us from our sins by his blood"* (Rev. 1:5b.) Grace is God's benevolent favor extended to us in Christ. We may define *"peace"* as one of the blessings that result from God's grace: *"since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Rom. 5:1.)

Grace and peace are extended to us by the Triune God: *"Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come."* Here is a reference to God the Father in His identity as the sovereign and eternal God who is Lord over all (note verse 8.) Christian, it is God the Father in His capacity and identity as the Almighty God who extends to you His grace and peace: *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Rom. 8:31b.) This divine grace and peace also come to us *"from the seven Spirits who are before His throne."* Here is a reference to the Holy Spirit in His character of perfect holiness, (in Scripture the number "seven" is the number that represents perfection,) and as He gives us direct contact and communion with the throne of God, from Ephesians 2:18 we learn that as Christians, it is *"through [Christ] we ... have access to the Father by one Spirit."* Christian, the Holy Spirit in all His perfection and as the One who knows the mind of God—*"Who among men knows the thoughts of another man, except that man's own spirit that is within him? In the same way, no one knows the things of God, except the Spirit of God"* (1 Cor. 2:11)—conveys His benediction to you. Finally, this benediction of grace and peace comes from *"Jesus Christ"* (vs. 4-5.)

In this passage the Lord Jesus is defined in the following terms: He is the One who is *"the first born of the dead."* The reference is to our Lord's own resurrection, as well as the fact that all who believe in Him shall finally participate in His resurrection. The Apostle Paul declares,

*But now [the fact is] Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep [in death].<sup>21</sup> Since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man ...<sup>23</sup> But each in his own*

*turn: the first fruits, [which is] Christ; then those who belong to Christ when he appears [in glory]. (1 Cor. 15:20-21,23)*

Jesus is further identified as the one who loves (present tense) us. Christ's love for His people is continuous—the Christian must not allow the clouds of trial and tribulation, which may hide the brightness of Christ's love, to refute the continuing reality of His great love. Finally, our Lord Jesus is identified as the one who *"released us from our sins by his blood."* The supreme expression of Christ's love was His work of redeeming His people *"while we were still sinners"* (Rom. 5:8.) Note that this redemption is not only from the penalty of sin, but from sin itself, as the angel informed Joseph, Mary would *"give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins"* (Matt. 1:21.) Redemption from sin was accomplished by the shedding of His blood—His perfect obedience unto death, a death that atoned for our sins, and the believer's connection to the saving death by faith in Christ Jesus. Christian, the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who loves us and is our Savior, conveys His benediction to us.

Let us be encouraged by our Lord's benediction. The Triune God in each of His divine Persons bestows His benevolent favor upon us. If men should curse us, let us remember that the Lord our God pronounces His blessing upon us. If men should turn away from us and cast us out of their presence, let us be assured that the Lord our God abides with us and looks upon us with His divine favor. As the LORD assures us: *"I know the plans I have for you, declares Jehovah, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future"* (Jer. 29:11.)

## **II. Be Encouraged by the Assurance of Our Lord's Dominion**

In verse 5 our Lord Jesus Christ is defined as *"the ruler of the kings of the earth."* Here is a reference to His ascension and exaltation at the right hand of God the Father:

*[God raised Christ] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, <sup>21</sup>far above every rule and authority and power and dominion and every title that can be given, not only in this present age but also in the coming age. <sup>22</sup>And "he put all things in subjection under his feet," and he appointed him to be head over all things for the church. (Eph. 1:20-22)*

At present, Christ employs the divine authority entrusted to Him to protect the souls of His people and to restrain the assaults of the devil against us. At the end of the age when He returns in glory, Christ will employ that divine authority to abolish all the demonic hosts and consign them and the devil himself to the lake of fire forever—that act of final judgment is graphically portrayed in Revelation 20:10, *"The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever."*

In verse 6 our Lord Jesus Christ is defined as the One to whom belongs *“the glory and dominion forever and ever.”* As the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, He forever shares with the Father and the Spirit in the divine glory and dominion. Knowing that He was soon to return to the Father, the Lord Jesus prayed, *“And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world was [created]”* (Jn. 17:5.)

In verses 12-16 John is permitted to see a revelation of Christ in His glory and dominion. There is a striking similarity between this revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ and the way in which He revealed Himself to Daniel so many centuries earlier. On both occasions He appears wearing a long flowing robe and a golden sash around His chest—the golden sash denotes royalty:

*... in the midst of the lamp stands was someone like the Son of man, dressed in a robe that reached down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.* (Rev. 1:13)

*I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen; his waist was wrapped with pure gold from Uphaz.* (Dan. 10:5)

On both occasions His eyes are seen to blaze like a flame of fire—the blazing eyes denote the Lord’s absolute purity, His abhorrence to even look upon evil, and His ability to search out wickedness and consume it:

*... his eyes were like a flame of fire.* (Rev. 1:14)

*... his eyes were like flaming torches.* (Dan. 10:6)

On both occasions His feet are compared to the brightness of polished bronze—the brightness of His feet denote the absolute glory of the Lord, a glory that is so overpowering one cannot even look at His feet, let alone His face:

*His feet were like polished bronze, as if it had been refined in a furnace.* (Rev. 1:15)

*... his arms and his feet were like polished bronze.* (Dan. 10:6)

On both occasions His voice has the depth and power of a deafening roar—the power of His voice denotes His divine majesty and authority (note Psalm 33:6, *“By the word of Jehovah were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.”*):

*... his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.* (Rev. 1:15)

*... the sound of his speech was like the sound of a multitude.* (Dan. 10:6)

On both occasions His face radiates with the divine glory—the radiance of His face again denotes the overwhelming and unbearable glory of the presence of the Lord:

*His face was like the sun shining in its brilliance.* (Rev. 1:16)

*... his face was like the appearance of lightning.* (Dan. 10:6)

Jesus proceeds to identify Himself to John by declaring, *“I am the First and the Last, <sup>18</sup>I am the Living One”* (vs. 17b-18a.) By revealing Himself to John in the same way He previously had revealed Himself to Daniel, our Lord Jesus Christ is declaring: “I AM the sovereign Lord of life. I always have been and I always will be the sovereign Lord of life. For one brief moment I entered into the world and into death for your sake and for your salvation. But My true and eternal identity is that I AM the sovereign Lord of life.”

The Lord Jesus, appearing in His divine glory and dominion, is seen walking among the seven golden lamp stands (vs. 13) and in His right hand He holds seven stars (vs. 16.) We are informed, *“the seven stars represent the angels of the seven churches”* (vs. 20.) That is to say, *“the seven stars”* represent the church as it exists in the presence of God in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, secure in the hand of Christ, note Colossians 3:3, *“you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”* During the days of His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus comforted and assured His disciples with these words:

*My sheep respond to my voice; I know them and they follow me. <sup>28</sup>I give them eternal life—they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup>My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. <sup>30</sup>I and the Father are one.* (Jn. 10:27-30)

We are further informed, *“the seven lamp stands represent the seven churches”* (vs. 20.) The *“seven lamp stands”* represent the church in its present earthly existence, with Christ present with us by the person of the Holy Spirit; note John 14:16-18,

*I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—<sup>17</sup>the Spirit of truth. The world cannot receive him, because it does not see him, nor does it know him. But you know him; because he stays with you and will be in you. <sup>18</sup>I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.* (Jn. 14:16-18)

Let us be encouraged by the assurance of our Lord’s dominion. Even now, as we continue in our earthly existence, we are held in the hallow of His hand in the heavenly places. Furthermore, our Lord is ever present with us to protect us from all evil and preserve our souls for His everlasting kingdom.

### III. Be Encouraged by the Promise of Our Lord's Return

John declares, "*Look! He is coming.*" We are to take heed and take comfort from the fact that our Lord will, indeed, return, as the angels testified to the disciples at the time of His ascension:

*They were looking intently up into the heavens as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup>"Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the heavens? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."* (Acts 1:10-11)

Do we live our lives with the awareness and the assurance of Christ's triumphant return?

John elaborates; our Lord Jesus is coming "*with the clouds.*" Here is a reference to the vision recorded in Daniel 7:13-14. Thus, John is made to see that our Lord's return at the end of the age is identified with the triumphant coming of the majestic and divine Son of Man—and, conversely, the divine Son of Man revealed to Daniel is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself:

*In the vision [I received] at night I looked and there before me came one who was like a son of man on the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and he was brought into his presence. <sup>14</sup>He was given authority and glory and a kingdom, so that all the peoples, nations, and [men of every] language should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that shall not be destroyed.* (Dan. 7:13-14)

Furthermore, John declares, "*every eye shall see him, including those who pierced him.*" Here is a reference to our Lord's universal vindication: God will cause all the world to see the One whom they rejected, the One whom He has exalted to supreme honor and glory. John goes on to say, "*and all the peoples of the earth shall mourn because of him.*" On that day the longsuffering of God over the world will give way to the justice of God, vindicating His Son and condemning the world; on that day the words of Jesus will be fulfilled in all their awful fullness: "*I told you that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins*" (Jn. 8:24.)

John concludes with the exclamation, "*So shall it be! Amen.*" As Christians, we are to desire and pray for that day when, in the words of the hymn writer, Frances R. Havergal, our Lord is "vindicated and enthroned, unto earth's remotest ends glorified, adored and owned."

Let us be encouraged by the promise of our Lord's return. At the very end of the Revelation, the Lord Jesus will speak one more word of assurance: "*He who bears witness about these things says, 'Yes, indeed, I am coming soon!'*" On behalf

of the entire church, the Apostle John responds, *"Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!"* (Rev. 22:20.)

## **Conclusion**

At the very beginning of the Revelation our Lord addresses to us His own word of encouragement and assurance.

Such a word was needed by those who first received the Revelation. The Apostle John, the recipient of the Revelation, was imprisoned for Christ on the Isle of Patmos (vs. 9.) The seven churches of Asia, the original churches to whom the Revelation was addressed, suffered great pressures to deny their Lord and to conform to this present world (Rev. 2-3.)

Such a word of encouragement is needed by the church of Christ in all the ages of history, as we seek to live for Christ in a world that is hostile to Him. Despite what we may encounter from the world and what we may encounter as we live in the world, may our hearts be encouraged by: 1) our Lord's word of blessing: *"Grace and peace to you;"* 2) the assurance of our Lord's dominion: *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God ... the Almighty;"* and 3) the promise of our Lord's return in power and great glory: *"He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him."*