

Revelation

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[0 : 00] May the Lord help us to consider words you'll find in the first chapter in the book of the Revelation.

The first chapter in the book of the Revelation, reading from verse 4. John, to the seven churches which are in Asia, grace be unto you and peace from him which is and which was and which is to come.

And his father, unto him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Amen. There are parts of the word of God which are always very hard for me to speak from.

And I'm sure that verses like this would be hard for anyone to speak from because they set before us such a holy and elevated picture of the glory of Jesus Christ, the glory of God, and also such a high and holy view of the standing and blessedness of the people of God.

[2 : 12] And it may be that in your own soul you're feeling very different to that. It may be that you feel very spiritually low and barren and cold.

And in that condition there is not that responsiveness to the word of God. There is not the activity of faith as you read the word of God.

And there is often a shrinking away from the word of God. Nevertheless, it was just part of this text which seemed to be pressed upon my attention in the fifth verse, unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood.

However, I shall try to speak first generally about the words of the text. You know that this chapter is the introduction to one of the most mysterious, and yet one of the most beautiful, of all scripture books.

We may be sure that it is a book which has in it very important instruction. Although often the words of the book are mysterious, and we need much grace and spiritual understanding to enter into the book.

[3 : 52] And my own experience has been this, that I have needed much help from men who are wiser and more deeply taught and have a far greater knowledge of the scriptures than I have.

It is not wise to follow any single man, and it is certainly not wise to be involved in needless disputations about the meaning of every single part of this book.

Verse 3 of this chapter tells us that the book is of peculiar significance, and that those who have grace to read it spiritually will find great profit in it.

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein, for the time is at hand.

One thing I have often felt, just by the way, in regard to the book of Revelation, is that many are frightened away from the book, because of its obvious obscurity in certain parts, and because of the disputes that have raged about it.

[5 : 09] Now that is very sad, because there is much in the Revelation which is abundantly clear. And I believe it will be profitable for you to read through prayerfully and carefully the whole book.

Those parts which you feel you cannot really understand, leave for the time being. Maybe the Lord will open your understanding to see the truth of those parts.

But as I say, there are many, many precious passages in this book, which will be very clear and plain to you. If you bear in mind that this is a book which records something of the tremendous conflict between Christ and his great enemy.

This is the conflict between Christ and Satan. Sometimes you see the conflict from, as it were, a spiritual viewpoint.

You see the conflict between spiritual powers. But more often than not, you see the conflict as it is fought out on this world, amongst men, between and in the nations.

[6 : 31] You see the power of truth being opposed by the power of error. You see the power of grace being opposed by the spirit of worldliness.

You see satanic delusions face to face with divine grace and the power of truth. Well now this first chapter is an introduction to the whole book and is especially an introduction to the following chapters in which you read those seven letters to the seven churches of Asia.

John, to the seven churches which are in Asia. Immediately one may say well what usefulness can be served in our considering letters that were written to seven churches in Asia all those years ago?

Well, again without entering into the disputes that have raged about the seven letters surely the truth is plainly and evidently this that the instruction of the seven letters to Asia is instruction that we need now.

It is instruction which any true church of Jesus Christ needs. Any church in any city. Not just the seven churches in the cities of Asia but any church in any city, town or village.

[8 : 09] And I am certain of this that the instruction of those seven letters is not to be restricted in any way at all.

Some have very wrongly applied I feel the letters to certain ages in the development of the church's history. But the tendency of that interpretation surely would be to rob the church today of vital and important instruction.

But what may we learn from this? John, to the seven churches which are in Asia. Why we may learn that God will use his servant, John to send a message to seven churches and those seven churches are representative of the whole true church of Jesus Christ.

Beyond that, surely I feel we need not go at the present time. The number seven in Scripture like the book of the Revelation has always a significance.

It has that significance of completeness. Just as the Lord created the heaven and the earth in six days and rested upon the seven.

[9 : 39] So we have that pattern of completeness appearing again and again. And it is so here. These seven churches of Asia are in a very special sense representative of the whole true church of Jesus Christ.

The 20th verse of the chapter explains that. The seven stars are the angels or messengers of the seven churches and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

And John sees in this wonderful vision one like unto the Son of Man walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.

So then, what follows in our text is what is true of the whole living church of Jesus Christ.

And I like to think of this in a special way. You remember that the churches in Asia were seven distinct and separate churches.

[10 : 50] What John saw was Jesus Christ walking among seven distinct and separate candlesticks. It was not like the seven branch candlesticks at the candlestick of the Jewish temple.

They were seven separate candlesticks. And yet the Lord was amongst them in the midst of them. You know, the Lord has a special regard for these small gatherings like you have here.

The gathering together of his people in a particular locality. The Lord is especially mindful, I believe, of those gatherings where two or three are gathered together in his name.

You may find it discouraging sometime when you feel that you gather together and you are sad because there are so few. But remember this, that Jesus himself walks amidst the seven golden candlesticks.

Although, to your view, just as it would have been to any one of the churches in Asia, to your view, you may be separated from the others by distance.

[12 : 13] Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea were separated from each other by quite a distance. In those days, distance would mean more than it does today.

Yet, the message of this chapter is that they are all in God's sight together and he is in the midst of them. Or there is a precious unity, a spiritual unity in the true church.

And so there is a spiritual relationship between the scattered parts of Christ's true church to the seven churches which are in Asia.

Well, lastly on this point, what follows immediately in our text is a gracious message then to the church of Jesus Christ in whatever age these words are read.

not just in the age when they were written. This is the message of the Lord God to his people down through the centuries. and from the seven spirits which are before his throne and from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness.

[13 : 51] Immediately, in the greeting that John sends to these churches, you have the great doctrine of the Trinity. you have the eternal God.

Him which is and which was and which is to come. A wonderful description. Him which is. He that comes to God must believe that he is. That is one of the fundamental points of our most holy faith.

We believe that God is. Now this is the message which is sent to encourage the faith of his church down through the centuries.

God is. And don't think that that is too simple a thing to emphasize. Friends, if you've ever been tempted of the devil, it'll be a great point with you that God is.

[15 : 04] And it'll be no simple matter to have resolved in your heart that God is. The power of unbelief and infidelity is a terrible thing and holds the greater part of the world in its grip.

It is no small thing to say I believe that God is. and to have in your heart a very real sense that he is.

To know that he is. Him which is and which was. I am the Lord, I change not.

Therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. This is the same precious doctrine as you find written throughout the pages of Scripture. The eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms.

The same doctrine. The eternal God. The unchanging faithful God which is and which was and which is to come.

[16 : 17] when you remember when you remember that often in this book of the Revelation there are recorded times of severe trial, times of great danger, times of tremendous spiritual upheaval in the world, times of tremendous spiritual conflict being waged in the world, times of persecution and for some times of martyrdom God this is a precious truth.

Him which is and which was and which is to come. in times of temptation times of unbelief God may seem very remote to us but there are some who have been deeply persuaded of this truth that he will come again that God is to descend from heaven with a shout that all men are to stand before God that all shall give an account to God of the deeds done in the body whether they are good or bad he is to come and he who is eternally just is just in his coming just in his judgment he is he was he is to come and from the seven spirits which are before his throne again you have that same number seven the seven spirits which are before his throne why should we read the seven spirits like that with a capital

S there is not the slightest doubt that our translators believe that this was referring to the Holy Spirit the pattern of the words makes it abundantly plain that that is so we have the doctrine of the Trinity Father Son and Holy Ghost well just as the seven churches symbolize the complete church the complete church in its entirety so we have this expression the seven spirits which represents to us all that the blessed spirit of God is all his blessed person all the manifold ways in which that blessed spirit works all his manifold purpose purpose of God being fulfilled in this earth through the work of the holy and ever blessed spirit of

God the seven spirits which are before his throne and that is significant too the Holy Spirit is in readiness that the feeling of these words seems to me to be this that there before the throne of God are these seven spirits the Spirit of God is in readiness the Spirit of God is willing and he will do God's bidding Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would come upon his people in answer to his own prayer he gave to them the gift of this Holy Comforter now friends that Holy Comforter comes from the throne of God that Holy Comforter is God that Holy Comforter has divine power that Holy

Comforter has divine authority he shall take of the things of Jesus and reveal them and what follows in the book of the Revelation has intimate connection with this thought because now on this earth the purpose of Christ is being fulfilled through the power of the Spirit of God not by his personal presence here on earth but by the power of that blessed Spirit whom he has sent and from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness and the first begotten of the dead Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness how shall we understand these words the faithful witness firstly

[21 : 32] Jesus Christ is the faithful witness in that he is God manifest in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ you may see God as faithfully as that John perhaps more deeply and more clearly than any other writer of scripture leads us into the doctrine of the precious deity and real humanity of Jesus Christ it does seem to me friends as though John was a man who was especially blessed with a spiritual perception of the preciousness of that doctrine in the beginning was the word the word was with God the word was God now he is a faithful witness in that particular sense the word was made flesh and dwelt among us we beheld his glory the glory as of the only begotten of the father full of grace and truth a faithful witness friends if you know

Jesus Christ you know God he is as faithful a witness as that in all that he came to teach in all that he came to do he is showing to us what God is you say what is God like friends he is like Jesus Christ for Jesus Christ is God no man has seen God at any time we may have some dim conception of the majesty and glory of God but friends if we would know the character and beauty and attractiveness of God we must see it in Jesus Christ for he is the faithful witness he bears witness in his own person to his father he says I and my father are one secondly he is a faithful witness in this respect that all that he testifies to is divine truth what

Jesus says carries with it the weight of divine authority and that is not a small or an obvious thing to say not a thing so obvious as to be despised the Lord will bring you I believe into such straits in your life such perplexities such times of need if he is teaching you by his spirit that there will be one thing left for your soul to rest upon and that will be the absolute faithfulness of the word of Jesus Christ you will have to say in the face of all conflicting evidences and circumstances let God be true and every man a liar whatever Satan says whatever the devil tempts you to think

God is true and Jesus Christ is that faithful witness and you know friend one of the greatest aspects of real spiritual gracious faith is to rest implicitly trustfully upon the word of Jesus Christ the faithful witness very much connected with that thought is a third thought and that is that a faithful witness never misleads and never deceives now friends if your heart is seeking the truth and you want to know the way of truth you want to be instructed in the truth I can say that without the least shadow of hesitation the Lord Jesus Christ will never mislead you no never deceive

Jesus Christ never builds up false hope in people's mind regarding himself some people get into terrible times of temptation about these things they get into all sorts of confusion of mind but come back to this that if there has been in your heart that attraction toward Jesus Christ that feeling of real trustfulness and confidence in his word you have felt encouraged by his own word to trust your all to him he has not deceived you and be certain of this that the devil will never encourage you to that the devil will never encourage you to trustfully believe the faithful testimony of Jesus

[27 : 14] Christ never from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness he'll never deceive you friend dwell much in your times of trouble distress and even in your times of despondency upon the faithfulness of this faithful witness for he sealed the truth of his own words by his own precious blood he told his disciples he would die and die he did he is a faithful witness he came to give his life a ransom for many and that ransom he paid he is that faithful witness who loved not his life even unto the death and humbled himself even to the death of the cross a faithful witness and

God has set his seal to the faithfulness of this witness because he is the first begotten of the dead the first begotten that is begotten of God by a peculiar unique divine action the first begotten of the dead he is the first fruits of them that sleep he is the first amongst many brethren he has that preeminence in his rising again from the grave which sets him above that eminence that Lazarus had for Lazarus was called from the grave by the word of Jesus Jesus rises from the grave in his own power and dignity called from the grave by that heavenly voice of his father father why he says thou shalt not suffer thine holy one to see corruption no because the work has been finished and complete there is nothing left to atone for death has been conquered hell is overwhelmed the devil completely beaten the first begotten of the dead and the prince of the kings of the earth king of kings and lord of lords now

I go back because I left the first part of this phrase grace be unto you and peace from him grace be unto you and peace I've often found that those who are most spiritually concerned about the things of God seem to be so unwilling to receive the word of God in a personal way unto you friends let me try and resolve it just simply this evening do you need such grace as you can see in Jesus Christ now that's a simple question do you need such grace as you can see in

Jesus Christ if so there is not a single word in scripture to suggest that Jesus Christ will not bless you with his grace grace be unto you I love these expressions because I have a heart that's just the same I could feel in my heart often that these are things too great for me I'm so unworthy of such great things as this oh friends the grace of God is a wonderful thing it has in it all that a sinner can ever need it has eternal salvation eternal blessedness eternal glory eternal joy it has all this in it grace be unto you and John sends these words to the seven churches in a very pressing way he says grace be unto you

God giving it is God in the fullness of his love and mercy and it is that grace flowing down from him grace be unto you and peace oh friends these churches were if not already passing through trouble soon would be passing through dire troubles what follows in the rest of the book of revelation shows to us that the church of Jesus Christ will pass through deepening troubles as history unfolds deepening troubles peace peace I leave with you he said my peace I give unto you not as the world give you have you been struggling to find peace of mind in the world have you been struggling to quieten the prickings of conscience with a peace which is no real peace many are many are and there are many more who will be saying to people like that peace peace where there is no peace peace but friends there is peace in

[33 : 39] Christ Jesus I used to be sorely troubled about words like that I used to say to myself well I don't even think of peace if there is so much false peace and you are in such danger of thinking that there is peace when there is no peace I used to hear preaching that seemed to just torment me my spirit until I hardly knew what to think oh friends if only I could see and could have seen then that peace which is in Christ and felt and known that peace in my own heart and conscience oh there is peace true real deep spiritual peace he hath made that peace between the sinner soul and God in his own dying upon the tree my peace

I leave with you my peace I give unto you not as the world giveth give I unto you let not your heart be troubled the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds by Christ Jesus friends it's that peace it's that peace and the gospel is a message of peace not false peace grace be unto you and peace from him which is and which was and which is to come from the seven spirits which are before the throne before his throne from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness the first begotten of the dead and the prince of the kings of the earth unto him that loved us and to him that loved us before we had been to him that loved us in that eternal covenant purpose of love and to him that received us from the hand of his father all that the father giveth unto me shall come to me now that's the love the love that Jesus as God's own eternal son had as he received the gift of his father all that the father giveth me shall come to me unto him that loved us and proved that love in a life of humiliation a life of shame a life of rejection a life of suffering who proved that love in his dying unto him that loved us even to the death of the cross wonderfully deeply powerfully graciously loved us couldn't help being impressed

I mentioned it at home last night by the way that Paul speaks of the Philippians he says I have you in my heart I have you in my heart now we can understand that some of us who have felt human affection very deeply we say to our closest friends I have you in my heart to pray for you now friend this is true of Jesus he has his people in his heart I have you in my heart Paul was only reflecting in a way the spirit of Jesus when he said that the spirit of Jesus is this that he has his people in his heart unto him that loved us he saw me says the hymn writer he saw me ruined in the fall yet loved me notwithstanding all friends that made no difference to his love never for one moment did that alter his own eternal love and purpose he saw me ruined in the fall yet loved me notwithstanding all unto him that loved us and that love is such love as we see in that good shepherd who leaves the ninety and nine in the wilderness and goes to seek and save that which was lost a love that orders all events and circumstances of life to bring that wandering lost sinner back to

God that love which sees that the gospel of mercy shall penetrate the hard heart of that sinner a love which will not let that sinner sink lower and lower in his sin until he falls into an eternal hell love that love that love that love which calls that love which attracts that love which binds a sinner's soul to God unto him that loved us and there was nothing nothing in you or me to draw down that love from God no it was his own free gracious sovereign love unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood there is a fountain open for sin and for uncleanness there is still it is a fountain in which the sin stained souls of men are still being washed and washed us from our sins in his own blood

I like those words of John in the first epistle if we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness if we say that we have not sinned we make him a liar and his word is not in us my little children these things write I unto you that ye sin not and if any man sin we have an advocate with the father Jesus Christ the righteous and he is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world the two words there seem often so attractive to me an advocate and the propitiation but I mustn't spend too long on that he hath washed us this is that cleansing atoning blood he has washed us it is hard for me to explain this it is better known than explained it is the power and virtue of the precious blood of

[41 : 41] Christ that cleanseth from all sin the power and virtue of that blood is expressed simply in these words in this way his own blood you might say well who else is ah friends but dwell on that his heart think who he is he said to his disciples after his resurrection when they were so troubled about his appearance to them he says it is I myself I myself all that I am all that you know me to be it is I myself now friends this blood is his own blood and all that you know that that means it is the blood of Jesus Christ God's Son and his blood shed for sinners it is blood that cleanses the vilest it is blood that washes away the deepest stain and sinners plunge beneath that flood lose all their guilty state and hath washed us from our sins in his own blood and hath made us kings and priests unto

God and his father to him be glory and dominion forever and ever amen amen now I don't I don't understand the deep mysteries of these words all I can see friends is this that John sends a message to these seven churches who he knew would have to suffer trouble at least those amongst them who were true believers would have to suffer trouble and distress for Christ's sake they would be despised by the world and he is telling them that they have a glorious standing in Christ Jesus it's not a sort of personal attainment in religion not at all it is a divine and gracious blessing which God has freely bestowed upon his people he has made us kings and priests unto

God and his father from what follows in the book of the revelation we see that the people of God the redeemed of Jesus Christ have such relationship to Jesus Christ that they will know something of the joy of that supreme dominion of Jesus Christ now as I say these are great mysteries but in one sense they will reign with him they will reign with him he has made us kings and priests the hymn writer puts it in another way he speaks of reigning over ourselves reigning over ourselves now here on this earth we can't do that Paul couldn't he says when I would do good evil is present with me he had that power over his own nature no friends there is no conflict like that in heaven the redeemed of

God in heaven have a blessed freedom a blessed freedom to serve God and to do his will they are true kings in that sense that they have a freedom to do what they will do kings and priests to commune with God to be close to God to know the power and blessedness of the blood of Jesus Christ God's Son kings and priests unto God and his father to him be glory and dominion forever and ever amen a little a little of that persuasion in our hearts that he has loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood will surely awaken thankfulness friends we cannot describe in human language the wonder of that great salvation thanks be unto

God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ there are many songs of praise and thanksgiving that follow in this book to him be glory and dominion forever and ever now just in conclusion very simply is that how God's dealings with your soul have affected you when the Holy Spirit deals with your soul it will humble you but it will exalt Christ it will make you feel less than the least of all saints but it will also make you feel that Jesus Christ is worthy to be praised to him be glory and dominion and another thing that I believe you will feel very deeply in your heart is that you want

[47 : 47] Jesus to have all the glory and all the power and all the dominion and you want to see him ruling and reigning over your life and over the world over the kingdoms of this world you long to see the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of his son and of his Christ to him be glory and dominion forever and ever and those words that Jesus taught his disciples will be really echoed in your very heart you'll say thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven to him be glory and dominion forever and ever amen