

Dear friends in Christ,

Have you ever noticed that there doesn't seem to be an advantage in being a follower of Christ in this world? And doesn't that frustrate you sometimes?

- You are up for a promotion and so is your colleague who isn't a church person. You pray about it and ask God that you would get the promotion. And then your colleague gets it. What's that all about?
- You really need a good grade on your final exam. You study hard but you don't get the grade. Meanwhile, several of those in your class who aren't church people end up passing. Does that discourage you?
- You can observe similar patterns with sickness and terminal illnesses.
- You can see it with financial successes.
- The believer struggles. The unbeliever succeeds.
- But maybe the most difficult to accept is when the church is persecuted. When believers suffer not in spite of being Christians, but because they are Christians! That's hard for us to understand why people gathered in a church to worship God would be attacked maybe by gunmen, maybe with a bomb, and many of them killed. This happens regularly throughout the world.

One of the biggest challenges to our faith is that as followers of the one true God, it frequently appears as if the one true God is not on our side, or is not fighting for us, or is not with us.

This final Sunday of the church year is called "Christ the King" Sunday. It's the perfect way to end our church year, because sometimes circumstances and suffering can lead the Christian to question: is Christ really the King? Then why this? Why does he not listen and act?

We need our faith strengthened, friends, so let's turn our attention to the book of Revelation. John wrote Revelation to seven churches that were undergoing persecution and hardship. They were discouraged, worn out, pressed down. They didn't understand, and their faith was being seriously challenged. To those churches, Revelation is a word of encouragement. To us, it is a word of encouragement.

In the five verses we are looking at today, our God teaches us something today that is vitally important. So listen. Three things we're going to look at more closely today: When it comes to the concept of Christ the King, and when you are tempted to doubt because of what you are going through that he is King, God wants to understand this: 1) He wants you to know what is "to you" from him. That is, he wants you to know what he gives to you, and to better understand from whom it comes. What is "to you"? We'll see. 2) He also wants you to understand what is "to him." No matter what happens in your life, if you give to Christ the King what is "to him" then this will change how you stand up under the trials of this world. 3) And finally, he wants you to understand what is "to be"... the conclusion of all matters... when it comes to Christ the King.

So that's where we're going: What is to you. What is to him. What is to be. John speaking to the seven churches that were oppressed and persecuted says:

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, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

- To you grace and peace. Undeserved kindness. Peace (not turmoil.) Great in theory, but what assurance do I have that they will be mine? How can we be sure that this isn't just an empty wish, like when we say, "Have a nice day" but we have very little influence over that wish becoming a reality? Consider *from whom* these things are given.
 - is, was, is to come. With this term God stresses his eternal, unchanging nature. He is all sufficient to himself, dependent on nothing, supreme, infinite, faithful, author of all things. This is the one who gives you grace and peace!
 - The seven spirits. The translation here can also be: Seven-fold spirit, and I think that is the preferable one. The number seven in Revelation is a number signifying perfection, or sometimes God's covenant with man. The seven-fold spirit is the one whose work of establishing God's connection to you is perfect. He is the one who has created and sustained faith in you which connects you to Christ. From the spirit of God, grace and peace are yours.
 - From Jesus Christ:
 - witness (he testifies the truth of the invisible God – the Word made flesh),
 - faithful one (fully reliable, making good on every promise to you.),
 - first born from the dead (the one who lived, died and rose again... you can always trust the word of one who self-resurrects. He is the firstborn, meaning many more will follow: grace and truth from him!
 - Ruler of the kings of the earth. The one who is complete control. The one who is the king over every other king. The one with the ultimate authority and the ultimate power. This is the one who says and gives to you "grace and peace."
 - So with all of these, Jesus defines his credentials so that you will know the giver, so you will know the one who promises. So when he says to you "grace and peace" are to you, you know they really are to you know matter what you deal with in this world.
- Just as important, what is not promised to you? To you from him: everything! To from the world: nothing. To you grace and peace from God. Not: to you success and prosperity. To you good health and no pain. To you job promotions. To you fame. O you power. God does not promise you as a follower of him that the world will give you a single thing. He does not guarantee that your family will acknowledge your hard work or appreciate you.
- Instead focus on what he does promise you and latch on to that: Grace. Peace. From him!

Transition: Now you know what is to you from him: grace and peace. Now, what is "to him" from 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.

- To him: be glory and power (or dominion) forever and ever!
 - First, notice that "to you" comes first because what God gives to you is not dependent on you. If you or I had written this, we would have done this differently. "To him who is the almighty God give obedience, prayer, devotion, praise, love, perform your best, work your hardest, etc. If you give to him sufficiently, then he will give to you.

But John reveals the opposite! To you: grace and peace apart from anything you've done to him. In response, what is to him? Glory and power forever and ever. The response of what he's given to you, is to give to him... give what? Worship and praise. Honor and glory.

- Why this to him?
 - He loves us. In spite of who we are: sinful rebels, in spite of what we've done: not obeyed, he loves us. Independent, undeserved, unconditional... love. Praise him!
 - And has freed us from our sins by his blood. The proof of the full extent of his love. He granted us freedom at the highest price to himself conceivable.
 - And made us to be **a kingdom**. You are a citizen of a new place: the Kingdom of God. Just as being a U.S. citizen has privileges, citizenship in the Kingdom of God has privileges. You already are in that kingdom and you will live with Christ forever in that kingdom.
 - **and priests** to serve his God and Father. The priest was the one who had access to God. The priest was the one who could enter the presence of God and present prayers and requests, and God would listen. You are a priest. You have this right through the Lord Jesus Christ! So we praise him for this privilege!
- The truth is glory and dominion are his. Always has been, always will be. There are those who acknowledge it and there are those who challenge it. If you want to be in control, you are a challenger and your life will be stressed as you buck the creator of the world. When you give to him what you shouldn't, Or you can yield to the king in worship, in which case, all falls into place.
- What is not to him? Questioning. Challenging. Rebellion. Disobedience. Doubt.

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

- SO this final part tells us what is to be. Even when you hear what is "to you." And when you hear what is "to him", our eyes look around and see the injustice. We see Christians persecuted and killed. We see church people suffer. We see an unfair world where it seems like Christ isn't King, and our faith is shaken. So God says, "Let me just tell you that what you see is not all.
- He is coming!
 - **Every eye will see, even those who pierced him and all people will mourn over him.**
The day of justice is coming. Those who pierced him thought they had the victory over him. Every appearance was that they won and Jesus lost. But he will come again and every person who has ever lived on this planet will see him, and they will know. They will mourn because they will know they are accountable for all their wrongs. For them it will be a terrifying day. For those who trust in Christ the king... a glorious day!
 - **"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."** Alpha is the first greek letter. Omega is the last. God

is eternal so he is the beginning and end of everything. Everything is from him and all is to him. No evil doer will escape his justice or his might power. In the end everything will be set straight.

Dear suffering Christian friends, take courage! In these final days when you grow weary and times are tough and you feel despair hanging over you, remember Christ the King. Remember what is to you: Grace and peace (and from whom it comes!) Remember what is to him: glory and dominion forever and ever! Remember what is to be: His glorious return and final judgment when all the wrongs of this world are made right. Keep before your eyes this vision of Christ the King risen, powerful, victorious, reigning... FOR YOU! Glory and Dominion to Christ the King! Amen.