

REVELATION 1:4b-7

JESUS NOW

“Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

“To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.”¹

Christmas is recognised as a time of giving and receiving gifts. Though there is no specific command in Scripture that we are to celebrate thusly, it does seem appropriate in light of the homage presented with the gifts by the Magi to the newborn Christ child. Moreover, we who are Christians have received rich gifts from God.

We read in Scripture of the gifts God has given. Knowledge of Him and His acceptance of sinners are spoken of as gifts [cf. **HEBREWS 6:4**]. Salvation is a gift [**EPHESIANS 2:8**]. God’s constant supply of the needs of believers is recognised as His gift [**2 CORINTHIANS 9:10-15**]. The various ministrations of the Spirit among God’s holy people is a gift to the congregations of the Lord [**1 CORINTHIANS 12:1 ff.**].

Among the great gifts that constitute the heritage of believers is grace and peace; and the gifts we enjoy are from the Triune God. As John began writing the Apocalypse, he began with a greeting that was actually a prayer for those reading to enjoy grace and peace from the Living God. Reviewing that prayer, we can learn some vital truths concerning Jesus now. Where is He? What is He doing? What is His plan for the future? These are questions that can stimulate the mind of believers to holy lives and good deeds in the Name of the Master.

JESUS NOW REIGNS — “Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.” The concept of the Triune God is unique to the Christian Faith. We do not worship three gods, nor do we, as is true for some so-called Christian cults, say that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are merely differing expressions of the One True God.

When John prays for “grace and peace,” three times he carefully says that it is “from” the Father, “from” the Spirit, and “from” the Son. By repeating the preposition, John is emphasising that He speaks of one God in three persons. God is a Triunity—Father, Son and Spirit are one in essence, one in purpose, and one in power.

The Father is described as transcending time, for He is that One “who is and who was and who is to come.” Before ever time was, God existed. When time shall have ceased, God shall yet exist. At the present time, God is. Throughout His ministry in the flesh, Jesus spoke of God as “the Father.” For instance, He encouraged the disciples to think of God as their Father [**MATTHEW 5:45; 6:1, 4, 6, 8, 9**]. He would caution those who follow Him against calling any man on earth “father” because we “have one Father, who is in heaven” [**MATTHEW 23:9**].

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John speaks of the Spirit of God as “the seven spirits who are before [the] throne.” There are commentators who believe that this speaks of seven angels; however, it seems best to understand that John is speaking of the Spirit of God. This statement demands explanation. One reason I make this assertion is that John asserts that grace and peace come from God and from Jesus Christ, so it is quite natural to understand that the Spirit of God also confers grace and peace. No angel is ever said to give grace and peace, though they may be capable of announcing God’s peace among those with whom God is pleased as did the angels who announced the birth of the Christ [see LUKE 2:14].

Later, John will speak of the Lamb having “seven eyes,” which he asserts “are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth” [REVELATION 5:6]. Again, the Revelator will speak of “seven torches of fire,” which he declares are “the seven Spirits of God” [REVELATION 4:5]. In these latter verses, John clearly speaks of the references as being to the “Spirits of God.”

Perhaps you wonder why John would speak of the Holy Spirit as “the seven Spirits of God” when we are plainly taught that “there is ... one Spirit” [EPHESIANS 4:4]. John’s statement appears to be an allusion to a statement that Isaiah makes concerning the Spirit of God at work in the life of the Messiah. Isaiah writes,

“The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide disputes by what his ears hear”

[ISAIAH 11:2, 3]

Isaiah employs seven different terms to speak of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of the LORD, the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of understanding, the Spirit of counsel, the Spirit of might, the Spirit of knowledge, and the Spirit of the fear of the LORD. Seven is recognised as symbolic of completeness or fulfillment, and it would seem natural to understand that John uses this number to demonstrate the perfection of the Spirit’s ministry in this present dispensation.

Presently, the Spirit of God works throughout the world among all peoples. In addition to convicting “concerning sin and righteousness and judgement” [JOHN 16:8], He provides the breath of life to all living beings in the world [see GENESIS 2:7; JOB 34:14, 15]. He also struggles with all people to restrain sin [GENESIS 6:3; 20:6; 2 THESSALONIANS 2:6, 7].

John also identifies Jesus as “the firstborn of the dead.” The term “firstborn” does not refer to Jesus’ generation, but to His position [see PSALM 89:27]. What is important in this title is that Christ could not be firstborn from the dead without dying. Therefore, John’s title looks back to the substitutionary death as He provided a sacrifice sufficient for the sin of all mankind. Listen to these testimonies to Christ’s sacrificial death.

“Every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. And no one takes this honour for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

“So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,

‘You are my Son,
today I have begotten you;’

as he says also in another place,

‘You are a priest forever,
after the order of Melchizedek.’

“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek” [HEBREWS 5:1-11].

Again, the same author writes, “When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” [HEBREWS 9:11-14].

There is one final reference to His substitutionary death that is worthy of hearing once more. “By a single offering [Christ] has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” [HEBREWS 10:14].

Of course, the term “firstborn from the dead” speaks of Christ’s resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is the basis for the Good News we declare to all who are willing to receive it. Paul says that Jesus “was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead” [ROMANS 1:4]. Moreover, because God raised Jesus from the dead, that resurrection is proof that He will judge the world [ACTS 17:31]. No wonder the natural man resents hearing of the resurrection of Jesus! In his heart, because of the testimony of the Word and of the Spirit, the lost man knows that because Jesus has risen from the dead, that he must one day face judgement. Nevertheless, if Jesus has been raised, then we anticipate a resurrection to life in Him.

Having identified the blessing of grace and peace as coming from the Father and from the Spirit of the Lord, John then speaks of this blessing proceeding from Jesus Christ, whom John identifies as “the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and ruler of kings on earth.” The titles John used point to the deity of the Risen and Ascended Son of God.

First, John speaks of Jesus as “the Witness, the Faithful One” (literal translation). Later, John will inform us that Jesus is called “Faithful and True” [REVELATION 19:11]. It is a reminder of the character of God Who cannot lie [NUMBERS 23:19; ROMANS 3:4; TITUS 1:2; HEBREWS 6:18]. God’s testimony does not require confirmation from others in order for it to be verified, because God bears truthful and reliable witness about Himself [JOHN 8:14].

Jesus is also “the ruler of kings on the earth.” There is a truth here that is forgotten by many. Jesus’ rule over the kings of the earth is by divine right, not by willing acceptance of those same kings [e.g. **PSALM 2**; **DANIEL 2:34, 35, 44, 45**; **7:11-14**; **24-27**]. The world rejects the reign of Christ, and the refusal to permit Him to reign will only intensify as the age moves to a conclusion. At His birth, Herod sought to destroy Him, realising that his own kingdom was threatened by the presence of a new king. At His return, the kings of the earth will seek to depose Him from His throne.

After His resurrection, Jesus walked among men and was seen by multiplied disciples. After fifty days, He ascended into heaven on a cloud where He is now seated by the right hand of the Father [see **ACTS 2:33, 34**; **COLOSSIANS 3:1**]. Though the Lord Christ is seated at God’s right hand now, there is a day when He shall rise to take control through the events which are known as the Great Tribulation [**DANIEL 2:44**; **REVELATION 11:15-17**].

It sometimes seems as if the world wishes to forget there ever was a Saviour. In the midst of the rush of daily life, knowledge of Christ is often pushed to the side where it is ignored. However, there is coming a time when knowledge of the Lord will fill the earth, and at that time there will no difference of opinion about Who is in control. Listen to a few promises of God that have been recorded concerning that time.

“On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea. It shall continue in summer as in winter.

“And the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one” [**ZECHARIAH 14:8, 9**].

“Many nations shall come, and say:
‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.’
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

[**MICAH 4:2**]

”They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.”

[**ISAIAH 11:9**]

To be sure, Jesus now reigns over the Kingdom of God, but even in the announcement of birth provided by the Prophet Isaiah is the promise that He shall reign over the entire earth.

“To us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.”

[ISAIAH 9:6, 7]

At His first advent, Jesus came as a humble child who would grow to adulthood at which time He would offer His life as a sacrifice for sin. Paul alludes to this when He says of the Lord, “He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” What follows that acknowledgement is the heart of the hope that is expressed in this text. “Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the Name that is above every name, so that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” [PHILIPPIANS 2:8-11].

Why would you wait? Now, Jesus is King. Now, Jesus offers pardon for sin. Now, Jesus is prepared to receive the rebel. I’ll not wait. I’ll place myself under His rule and take my place with the loyal subjects of this Great King. This is the reason the Word of God invites all, saying, “Now is the favourable time; behold now is the day of salvation” [2 CORINTHIANS 6:2b].

JESUS NOW BLESSES — “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” As John dedicates the book, it is to The Risen Son of God, though at this moment John does not spell out the Name of Christ. Rather, he focuses attention on the completed work that the Master has performed for the benefit of His people.

Already, all who have received the life of Christ, all who have ceased rebellion against this Great King, all who are now forgiven all sin and accepted into His Kingdom, all who are redeemed and born from above, enjoy these great benefits of the love of God, citizenship in the Kingdom of God, and the role of priests of God. This is our present position before the Lord.

Christ loves us. Presently, believers are the objects of God’s love. The verb is a present participle, so a somewhat literal translation would have us saying that He “keeps on loving us.” God is love [1 JOHN 4:8, 16]. And in love, God sent the Son to die, providing His own life as a sacrifice for sin. This is the import of the great testimony that John wrote in the Gospel bearing his name: “God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” [JOHN 3:16].

The opening words of this notable verse could be translated, “this is how much.” The Greek adverb can refer to the degree to which God loved the world—that is, to such an extent or so much that he gave his own Son, or simply to the manner in which God loved the world, i.e., by sending his own son. In this instance, the concept that is emphasised is the greatness of the gift God has given. With this in mind, then, it is likely that John is emphasizing both the degree to which God loved the world as well as the manner in which He chose to express that love. Thus, the focus of the Greek construction here is on the nature of God’s love, addressing its mode, intensity, and extent.² Surely, the Lord loves us, and the primary evidence is the sacrifice He has provided for our benefit.

² Biblical Studies Press, **The NET Bible First Edition** (Biblical Studies Press, 2006)

Remember that “Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” [EPHESIANS 5:2]. We are taught, and we have accepted as true, that “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” [1 JOHN 4:9, 10].

The degree of God’s love for us is incomprehensible; yet, God desires us to attempt to understand it fully as best we are able. The degree of God’s amazing love is demonstrated by the close relationship between the Father and the Son and the agonising cost to God in order to redeem us. This cost is all the more amazing when our condition as enemies of God is considered [ROMANS 5:6-10].

In this context, I appreciate Anthony Garland’s comment on the love of Christ. He says, “Our inability to worship God correlates with our ignorance of His Word. For it is by His Word that we come to an ever deeper understanding of the intimacy between the Father and the Son and the painful rent in that fabric necessary to secure our undeserved redemption. Emotional worship experiences in and of themselves can never substitute for a response based upon a Scriptural understanding of His love for us, as limited as it may ultimately be.”³

Christ is praised for His present ministry, which is loving His people; and He is praised for His past ministry of having freed us from our sins. Perhaps you have an older translation of the Bible that indicates that Christ washed us from our sins. “Freed” is translated from a Greek word, *lúsanti*, whereas the text that was used for many of the older translations is *louísanti*, which is translated washed. There is a difference of only one letter between these two words.

Of course, both statements are true for the believer. All who believe in Christ the Lord have been freed from their sin [e.g. MATTHEW 20:28; GALATIANS 3:13; 4:5]. Likewise, we who are believers have been cleansed [e.g. EPHESIANS 5:26; TITUS 2:14; 3:5; 2 PETER 1:9]. However, the evidence does appear to indicate that John wrote that we are freed from our sins by the finished work of Christ the Master. Whereas the love for which Christ is praised is a present, ongoing blessing to His people, the freedom from sins was provided by one act. When John writes that He “freed us from our sins,” he uses the aorist tense to indicate that this act was performed once, never to be repeated. All the benefits that come from Christ’s sacrifice are immediately applied to each believer the moment they receive this Living Saviour as Master over life.

When the Word says we are freed from our sins, it implies that all sin—imputed sin, inherent sin and individual sin—is addressed. The Greek construction states that we are removed from our sins, never to be accountable for the evil that we have done or which has been attached to our lives. As Scripture says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” [ROMANS 3:23], and that includes each one of us.

We are fallen creatures and we lack the ability to free ourselves from our sins. The problem facing mankind is not a lack of education or a poor social environment, but rather the problem that faces us is that we are sinners by birth and by choice. Therefore, we need One who is both outside and beyond our sinful condition to set us free if we are to know freedom.

This separation is multifaceted. Studying the Word, we see that we are delivered from Satan’s kingdom and separated to the Kingdom of Christ [COLOSSIANS 1:13]. We are separated from the world system, which lies under the control of Satan [JOHN 17:15, 16]. We are no longer vulnerable to the power or the penalty of sin [ROMANS 6:1-14; EPHESIANS 2:1-10; HEBREWS 2:14, 15]. And though we long for their salvation, we are separated from those who continue in their sin, those whom God calls “sons of disobedience” [EPHESIANS 2:2; 5:6].

³ Anthony C. Garland, **A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation** (Galaxie Software, 2006)

There is an aspect of being freed that is increasingly neglected today, and that is that the freedom was provided “by His blood.” A bloodless gospel is worthless because it is ineffective. God has stated, “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” [HEBREWS 9:22]. An earlier generation understood the necessity of blood to secure salvation, though we of modern times appear to have forgotten that truth. How many songs spoke of that bloody sacrifice, songs that are no longer sung in our day!

“What can wash away my sin?” (Nothing but the blood of Jesus)
“Alas, and Did My Saviour Bleed”
“And Can It Be?”
“Are You Washed in the Blood?”
“Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness”

Though the blood of Christ appears offensive to contemporary Christians, it nevertheless is true that our conscience is purified by “the blood of Christ” [HEBREWS 9:14]. We conquer the evil one “by the blood of the Lamb” [REVELATION 12:11]. We have peace because of the blood of the Master [COLOSSIANS 1:20]. We enjoy intimacy with the Father through the blood of Christ [EPHESIANS 2:13]. This is enough to make a Baptist shout! We have, not religion, but relationship, and this relationship is provided through the blood of Christ the Lord.

Moreover, the Risen Christ has “made us a kingdom,” that is, priests to God the Father. We are not kings, for there is One who is our King, and that is Christ the Lord. However, we are a kingdom. In us, Christ now rules, and though we believers will one day reign with Him [REVELATION 20:6], John’s focus is that we are now priests. Notice that “kingdom” is singular, while “priests” is plural. The emphasis is upon the fact that collectively we now constitute a kingdom, but individually we are priests of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the modern congregation, people see the pastor as one ministering before the Lord. However, in New Testament theology, each believer is a priest ministering before the Lord. You are not lay people; you are priests of God. You stand between God and fallen man. As you pray for the salvation of others, you are serving as a priest interceding with God for those who are in need. As you witness to others of the goodness of God, you are serving as a priest delivering the message of life. Day-by-day and moment-by-moment, you function as priests standing between God and sinful man. Throughout the world, we who are believers, we who are the Kingdom of God, are working as priests of God.

No wonder that John exults, ejaculating praises to this glorious Saviour. Indeed, we join him in exclaiming, “To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

JESUS NOW WAITS — “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced Him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of Him. Even so. Amen.” The coming of Christ is woven throughout the warp and woof of the book. No less than twelve times does the author testify that the Master is coming again.⁴ The final chapter of the book repeats His testimony as emphasis of the imminence of His return.

“Behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book” [REVELATION 22:6]. “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing My recompense with Me, to repay everyone for what he has done” [REVELATION 22:12]. “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely, I am coming soon’” [REVELATION 22:20].

⁴ REVELATION 1:7; 2:5, 16; 3:11; 6:17; 11:18; 14:7; 16:15; 18:20; 22:7, 12, 20

Though we focus on the birth of the Son of God during this Advent Season, I would have you focus on the fact that His first coming was to provide a sacrifice for sin, but in His Second Coming, Christ the Lord comes to reign. John's statement is not looking specifically to the Rapture of the people of God from the earth, for that event will be sudden and with no forecast to alert the earth that it is to happen. However, John specifically says "every eye will see Him," indicating that he is referring to the coming of the Master to reign. This fits the context of what we have seen thus far in this text, and it fits the citation from **ZECHARIAH 12:10**, that tells us that the Jewish people will "look ... on Him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over Him, as one weeps over a firstborn."

However, since "every eye will see Him," we know that this refers to the event predicted in **MATTHEW 24:30**, that informs us "Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" [see also **MARK 13:26**; **LUKE 21:27**]. The Day of His return is a day of repentance and deliverance for godly Jews, but it is a Day of Judgement for those who have lived without thought of Him or their responsibility before Him. That is a day when Jesus Christ will be "revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus" [**2 THESSALONIANS 1:7b, 8**].

None of us should rejoice in the knowledge of Christ's judgement on this unbelieving world, but each of us should rejoice in the knowledge that Christ shall put down all rebellion. During the days that remain, however long the Lord should be pleased to leave us here, we are given opportunity to deliver others from the coming wrath. We are the Kingdom of God, priests who stand between the Living God and dying mankind. To us has been granted the privilege of announcing salvation to all who will receive it. Let us determine that we will labour diligently in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, saving all whom the Lord is pleased to give us.

This is the message of Christmas, then. Christ came to give His life a ransom for all. Therefore, if you will receive Him as Master of your life, believing that He died because of your sin and that He was raised to declare you right with God, you shall be saved. This is the message we deliver, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart one believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth one confesses, resulting in salvation." The promise of God is that "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved" [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**].

How shall we call on the Name of the Lord? Believing that He died because of my sin and believing that He was raised to declare me right with God, coming before Him as the Living Saviour, I confess that I receive Him as Master over my life. Believing Him, I now dedicate myself to live as one belonging to His Kingdom, submitted to His reign and seeking His will in my life. This brings the salvation that is freely offered to all who will receive it. Our prayer is that this includes you.

For each of us who are believers, this is a joyous season that can serve to reenergise us to serve Him through telling others of His great salvation, while warning them of the judgement of God. May God enable us to discover in a fresh way His power to save as we serve Him through telling others of His present mercy. Amen.