Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Back to the Future, Part 2
Scripture: Revelation 1:1b-6
Code: 66-2

And now we have that great privilege of going back to the future in our study of Revelation. Open your Bible again to chapter 1 and let me make a brief comment. Someone last week said, "There are 404 verses in the book of Revelation. You covered half of the first one. We calculate that's 808 messages at 50 messages a year. That is a long, long time." So I want you to know that we will move more rapidly. We will move exceedingly more rapidly, taking larger chunks. But in the introduction it is necessary for us to set the stage for all of these messages to come. When we get into the narrative portions of the book, it does move rapidly, and we will do just that. But we need to deal with the issues in this opening section that are foundational to our understanding of this great book.

Now no book in the Bible reveals more of the glory of God, or more of the splendor of Jesus Christ than this book. And though it is so singularly blessed, it is still misunderstood, misinterpreted and neglected more than any other book in the New Testament, surely. To many it is a closed book, it is a sealed book. And that is exactly what God wanted it not to be. Some things God intends to be sealed. Back in Daniel 12:9 the Scripture says, "These words are sealed up until the end time." But this book is not to be sealed up. In Revelation, chapter 22 and verse 10, it says, "And He said to me, ‘Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.’" Don't lock it up, don't hide it away. Don't cover it. Don't seal it. Furthermore, it is the only book in the Bible that opens and closes with a blessing on the reader, the only one. It is not to be sealed and it is a blessing.

Revelation also is the last book in the divine library. It is God's last word. What began in Genesis ends in Revelation. In Genesis you have the commencement of heaven and earth; in Revelation the consummation of heaven and earth. In Genesis you have the entrance of sin and the curse; in Revelation you have the end of sin and the curse. In Genesis you have the dawn of Satan and his activities; in Revelation you have the doom of Satan and his activities. In Genesis you have the tree of life relinquished; in Revelation the tree of life regained. In Genesis death enters; in Revelation death exits. In Genesis sorrow begins; in Revelation sorrow is banished. In Genesis paradise is lost; in Revelation paradise is regained. But most central, in Genesis the Savior is promised; in Revelation the Savior is preeminent. And so, we are in for the journey of our lives, back to the future, to see the glory of what is to come as God brings all of redemptive history to its great climax.

Now to help us in our orientation in the book, I have tried to break this introductory section from verses 1 through 6 into several component parts. I'm not really struggling here to make a memorable, homiletical outline, but just to sort of segment these things so that we can grasp them and the

richness of them piece by piece. First of all, we noted in looking at the book of Revelation, its essential nature. In verse 1 it is the revelation; that is, it is the *apokalupsis*, the unveiling. It takes the cover off. It is not a hiding, it is a revealing. Then we noted its central theme: It is the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is about Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ in future glory unveiled, uncovered and made manifest.

Then we noted its divine source, “which God gave Him.” And I mentioned to you that God is the source of this book and that this book was primarily given by God to Jesus Christ because Christ had humbled Himself and because He had suffered. As a reward for His perfect submission, His perfect humility, His perfect suffering and perfect atonement, God now gives to Him the great record of His future glory. We noted next its specific recipients, and that is, God gave it to Christ to show to His bond-servants. That refers to Christians, those who are the servants of Jesus Christ. God gave it to Christ to give to us.

Fifthly, we noted its prophetic character. It is the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him, to show to His bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place. Now in that sense we are reminded it is a future prediction. This book looks ahead. It takes us into the future. There are elements of it that are in the past tense, as we note in verse 19, “the things which you have seen.” There are elements of it which in John's time were in the present tense, “the things which are.” But the majority of this book is about “the things which shall take place after these things.” It focuses on the return of Jesus Christ in all His glory and all of the attendant events and circumstances. So, we're going on a journey into the future. We're going to see things shocking. We're going to see things thrilling. We're going to see things troubling. We're going to see things joyful. We're going to see things painful. We're going to see things encouraging. We're going to see things disturbing. We're going to see things blessed. And what we're going to see could never be known if it weren't for this book.

Now this is not an evangelistic book. It is not designed really for unbelievers, though its power will impact unbelievers who hear its truths. God will use it to save, but it is a book of hope for Christians. It was given, first of all, to Christ, for Him to know fully and for the record to be laid down before the eyes of His children, His people, the future glory that will belong to Him. But it fascinates everybody, because everybody is fascinated about the future. Everyone wants to know the future. That's why they go and read their horoscopes. That's why they fumble around with their fortune cookies in the Chinese restaurant. That's why they go to people who supposedly read tarot cards and tell fortunes. But only one knows the future. That one is God. And in this book He gives it to us.

Now you'll notice in verse 1, in this particular point on the prophetic character of the book, there's one word there that I want to draw to your attention. It's the word *shortly*, *tacheos*, shortly. Now I want you to grasp the meaning of this because it does come into play in your understanding of the book. It can mean *in a brief time*, or to put it another way, it could mean *quickly*. It is the word from which we get

the English w1ord *tachometer*. Some of you have on your car a tachometer. It measures velocity. It measures the velocity of your engine, the revolutions per minute we call rpms. And we could see the word in that sense as a word that speaks about the velocity of this book. In other words, when you hit the future part in chapter 6, what comes, comes very fast, within seven years, an unbelievable spectacle of judgments take place that sweep the earth. And then in a thousand-year period called the kingdom, some amazing things take place until the whole of the universe is destroyed and a new heaven and a new earth is created. There is a certain brevity about these events. There is a certain velocity with which they happen. And once we get into that future part, hitting into chapter 6, you're going to feel like you are moving at about the speed of light, because it goes so fast. In just seven years the whole world's system of man and Satan is deluged with the horrific wrath of God. And then a kingdom, brief really, a thousand years, yet one day in the mind of God.

But that really isn't the main intent of this word. It could mean that, and perhaps the Spirit of God uses this word with some of that implication in it because that indeed is true. But the main meaning of this word is the idea of soon, soon. If we go to the end of Revelation it helps us to make this interpretation. In Revelation 22:12 Jesus says, "Behold, I am coming quickly." Now here you have *tachu* of the same word group, but it would seem here that He's not talking about the velocity with which He comes, but the nearness of His return. Down in verse 20, "Yes," He says again, "I am coming quickly." And again we wouldn't assume that He is speaking about the velocity of His coming but rather He's speaking about the nearness, or the *soonness* of it.

This is borne out by other uses of the word. In chapter 2, for example, look at verse 5, writing to the angel of the church at Ephesus, the minister in that church, the Lord speaks to the church. Down in verse 5 He says, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen and repent and do the deeds you did at first, or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place...unless you repent." And He did come and He did remove the lampstand. And here again is the emphasis on the nearness of His coming. It's a soon coming. Go down to verse 16, same chapter, "Repent," He writes to the church at Pergamum, "or else I am coming to you quickly." Again, it isn't the velocity of His coming, it is the nearness of it; it is impending. It is, to use the word we like to use, imminent. It's next. It's near. In chapter 3 the letters to the churches continue and we find in verse 11 the same statement, this time to the church at Philadelphia, "I am coming quickly." Again the emphasis is on the soon coming of Christ. And if you were to follow this use of the same word through Revelation, you would see it again in chapter 11 verse 14, "The second woe is past, the third woe is coming quickly." And so it goes.

It seems then best to see this word as a designation of the nearness of the coming of Christ and not the velocity with which He comes. Now the velocity with which He comes in the rapture is amazing because He comes and takes His church in what amount of time? The twinkling of—what?—of an eye, and that's fast. But when you compare the use of *tacheos* and its other forms throughout the book of Revelation, it seems best to see it as the nearness rather than the quickness. For example, in

2 Timothy 4, to go outside the book of Revelation, we find the same word used, and Paul writing to Timothy says, "Make every effort to come to me soon," same word. And I don't think he is saying to Timothy, "Could you please sprint?" I think he's just saying, "Could you get here as quickly as possible," not the velocity with which you move but the *soonness* with which you come.

So what we have then here, back in Revelation, chapter 1, is this idea of imminence, this idea that the next event on God's redemptive schedule is the coming of Christ, *soonness*, imminence. It doesn't necessarily mean that He's coming in a brief period of time. It means that this is the next on the schedule of events. It does not preclude a waiting time. In chapter 6, verse 10 we find some saints under the altar in the midst of the tribulation, the seven-year period, and they are saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth? And there was given to each of them a white robe and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer." So the fact that He is coming soon, that His coming is near, does not necessarily preclude a waiting time. The church has always lived in this expectancy. The apostle Paul, you'll remember from our study of 1 Thessalonians, assumed that Jesus could come in his life time. He uses the plural pronoun "we" and "us" and "our" to speak of those who would be taken in the rapture. And so the church has always lived in this expectancy.

Peter, no less expectant, in 1 Peter, chapter 4, verse 7 said, "The end of all things is near." He was living in the sense of imminency. You go back to Acts, chapter 1 and you find Jesus having ascended into heaven and the angel says to the men who are watching Him go into heaven, "This same Jesus who is taken up from you shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven." And so they were always living in that sense of expectancy. First Corinthians 15, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," the dead in Christ shall rise; the same thing that's in 1 Thessalonians 4. Hebrews 10 says we are not to forsake the "assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is...and so much the more, as you see the day approaching." And so, the church has always lived in the anticipation of this event. Now we don't know when it's going to happen because in Acts 1:7 Jesus said it very clearly, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority." Basically, that means, in plain English, it isn't any of your business; it's God's. And so we live in ongoing expectancy, knowing that the next great messianic event is the coming of Jesus Christ in glory.

And people are reminded. For example, in Luke 12, "Be dressed in readiness, keep your lamps alit. Be like men waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks." In other words, be ready all the time. Verse 40: "The Son of Man is coming in an hour that you don't expect it." And that looks ahead to the whole event of the second coming, with all its component parts, and says we don't know when that is going to happen so we all live in continual expectancy all the time. So, what are we learning in this wonderful opening section? One, the essential nature of the book: the central theme; the divine source; the specific recipients; and the prophetic character.

Let's look at a sixth point, all right? Let's call it the supernatural delivery, the supernatural delivery. We note then in verse 1, and this is a marvelous point, "The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants the things which must shortly take place [Listen now.], and He sent and communicated it by His angel." Here is its supernatural delivery. Now this has got to intensify my interest. My, this is very, very unusual. Do you know something? This is the only book in the whole New Testament that was delivered and transmitted by angels. This is wonderful. This sets this thing apart. This is a very unusual situation. But the Lord has chosen to bring the message of this book down to us by means of angels. Now what other great bit of revelation was delivered by angels? What was it? It was the law of Moses, wasn't it? Acts 7:53: You have “received the law as ordained by angels." And now we have this incredible book delivered by angels. In Revelation 22:16 as it closes out, we read, "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches." Now this book is sent by an angel. The word *sent; apostolos*; from which we get *apostle*, has the idea of a commissioned representative with authority on a mission. So there is angelic mission here, an angelic ministry. In fact, there's more angelic ministry in this book than any other book in the Bible. By the time we're done with this thing, you're going to be really acquainted with the angels. God turns loose angelic beings to bring this revelation of Jesus Christ to John, to his pen, and now to us. He sent and communicated it by His angels. Angels appear in almost every chapter. Just listen to this. They're in chapter 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20. They're all over the place, sixty-seven times in this book. We're going to get closely acquainted with the angels.

Then we meet number seven in our little list, kind of breaking up this introduction, its human agent. To whom do the angels bring the message to be written down? To whom do the angels give the vision? To whom do the angels give the revelation? It says, "Communicated by His angel to His bond-servant John." By the angel who belongs to Christ to the bond-servant who belongs to Christ, namely John. And John is absolutely overwhelmed. He never stops being overwhelmed. Look at chapter 1 verse 9: "I, John.” I, John: It's almost like he says, can you believe this? I, John, am getting this stuff. It's almost like he can't say, "And I have," “I,” and he has to say “John,” “It's me getting this, unthinkable.” In chapter 21 he's still kind of overwhelmed. He says, "And I saw the holy city," as if to say, can you believe that? Chapter 22, verse 8 and, “I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things." Now tell me something about John's gospel. Do you remember something when you studied John's gospel? In the entire gospel how many times does John refer to himself? None, but he's a humble guy. But here that's why he does refer to himself, because he's in shock that he's getting all this. He's also about eighty years old, or better. It's 96 A.D. He was a teenager at the Last Supper in 33 A.D. We're a long time later, sixty-three years later; he's got to be in his eighties. And he's exiled on the island of Patmos. He's an old man on Patmos, all by himself, and he just cannot believe what he is getting.

Verse 2 tells us about him. "Who bore witness to the Word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw." I'll tell you one thing about John, when he was young and when he

was old, he was a faithful witness. Do you remember when he wrote 1 John, how he started it? "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled concerning the Word of Life—and the Life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness." He said I'm writing it and I'm talking about it exactly the way I saw it and exactly the way I heard it and exactly the way it felt when I touched it. This is a true witness. You know what a witness is? Somebody who saw something happen and tells about it; that's what a witness is. I've been a witness. I saw, I saw an attempted murder one time. They took me to court. They said you're a witness, tell us what you saw, heard and felt, and I did. That's what a witness is. And John was a faithful witness. He bore witness to the Word of God. He saw the Word of God coming to him through these visions brought by angels. And he bore witness, secondly, to the testimony from Jesus Christ.

By the way, those are synonyms. The best I can discern, you go through the book of Revelation you'll find these two together several times. Chapter 1, verse 9, the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Over in chapter 12, verse 17, over in chapter 19, verse 10, they go together and they seem to mean really the same thing because the Word of God is the testimony from Jesus. It's the testimony from Jesus Christ to His church. And it's the other revelation that comes in the rest of the book, from chapter 4 to the end; all of this comes from Jesus Christ. You say, "Are you sure about that?" Yes. Verse 16, chapter 22, "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches." And so it comes from God but it also comes from Christ. And wouldn't we expect that the Trinity would be mingled? So John bore witness to the Word of God, and to the testimony coming from Jesus Christ, and exactly what He saw in these visions brought to him by angels is exactly what he wrote down. He is a faithful witness.

Now we come to the personal impact of all of this: the next point, number eight in our little list as we break this up; its spiritual blessedness, its spiritual blessedness. This is so wonderful. Verse 3, this really ought to get you here every week, right? "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and heed the things which are written in it." Blessed, blessed. If you listen to this being read and explained and you hear it with obedient ears and you heed it in your life, you're going to be blessed. That is the promise of God in this book. Look at the end of the book, chapter 22 verse 7, and I want to show you a similar promise. Verse 7, "Behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book." At the beginning is the blessing; at the end is the blessing; both from the beginning to the end, the promise that we are blessed.

Now let me take it a step further, all right? You will, if you stay tuned through this whole series, note many such blessings. Chapter 1, "Blessed is the one who reads." Chapter 14, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord..." Chapter 16, "Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes” on, and we'll explain that when we get there. Chapter 19: "Blessed are those ... invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb." Chapter 20, "Blessed and holy” are those who have “part in the first resurrection." Chapter 22, "Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." Chapter 22 again: "Blessed are those who wash their robes." Lots of blessing; in fact, I just read you seven blessings in

this book.

Now notice the three verbs here in verse 3: reads, hear, heed. All present participles, continuous action. And it really depicts a church service. It really does. Somebody reads, somebody hears, and then they apply. That's what he's asking you to do. I'll give you the reading which includes the explanation. You've got to hear it, and you will hear the little phrase, "Let him that has ears [What?], hear," over and over again in chapter 2 and 3. You need to learn to listen. I'll read it to you and give you the explanation which is included in the reading; you must hear it and you must heed it. It's so precious. It's God's last word. We don't have anything beyond this. We don't have anything beyond this of Revelation.

Now I want to give you a little footnote here. You just listen to this. Throughout the book of Revelation you find a lot of things that come in sevens. I just read you seven blessings that are in it. There are a lot of things that come in sevens. And that is a very important thing for us to note. There are seven churches, seven spirits, seven candlesticks, seven stars, seven lamps, seven seals, seven horns, seven eyes, seven angels, seven trumpets, seven thunders, seven thousand, seven heads, seven crowns, seven angels, seven plagues, seven vials or bowls, seven mountains and seven kings. And then, not with the number seven, there are other sevens, as I told you, seven beatitudes blessed, seven years of judgments, seven divisions of each of the letters to the seven churches, seven "I AMs" about Christ, and there are seven doxologies in heaven. And when you get through the book and you look at all that you say, "There's got to be a reason for this, right?" All these sevens: What is seven? Well you can go all the way back to the book of Genesis and find out. I'll just read it to you. Genesis 2:3: "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made." If seven means nothing else, seven means it's over. Seven is the number of completion. Seven is the number of fullness. And all the sevens in this book tell me that this is the completion. That's why in 22, chapter 22, look at verses 18 and 19, "I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book." Don't add to it. This is the book of sevens; this is the book of fullness; this is the end, when God is finished.

So what have we learned? The essential nature of the book: It is the revelation. The central theme: Jesus Christ. The divine source: God. The specific recipients: His bond-servants, namely believers. The prophetic character: things which must shortly take place. Its supernatural delivery comes through angels. Its human agent is John. Its spiritual blessedness is indicated to us there in verse 3: for those who hear and heed. And all of that is joined by a next point: its compelling urgency, its compelling urgency. The end of verse 3: "For the time is near." The time is near. The word *time* here; not *chronos*, that's clock time, calendar time. The word is *kairos;* that's epochal time, eras, epochs, seasons. The word *near*, *engus*, simply means the next great epoch of God's redemptive history is near. It's on the horizon, it's imminent. Chapter 22 verse 6 reiterates this. "He said to me, ‘These words are faithful and true’; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to

show to His bond-servants the things which must shortly take place." There we are; it's near. It's going to happen shortly. Verse 10 of chapter 22 says, "The time is near."

Now, you see, what the Holy Spirit is endeavoring to do is to force everybody in the church from the time this was written on to live in the light of the fact that this is the next event, and since we don't know when it's going to happen we have to live as if it were going to happen in the immediate future. This is not a concept unfamiliar to Scripture. God can say it's near and yet somebody is going to say: Well, two thousand years have passed; does God really mean what He says? Yes, if you understand that near means next. And you understand secondly that what might seem a long time to you is very brief to God, since with Him a day is as a thousand years, a thousand years is a day. And James 5:8 uses the same word—*engus*—the same word for *near*. "Be patient, strengthen your hearts...the coming of the Lord is near." James said it, too. Two thousand years have passed, it's still near; in fact it's nearer now than it ever was. Romans 16:20, do you remember that? That is one of the great promises. Romans 16:20 says, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet," *tacheos* again, soon. Well, you say, two thousand years have passed. Yeah, but it's next. It's next.

And yet, even though it's next and even though it's near, in Luke 18 we have an interesting note. The Lord says, in Luke 18 verse 7 and 8, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now shall not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?" In other words, all the godly people are crying about persecution and injustice: Lord, please come; Lord, please come; Lord, please come. And verse 8, Jesus said, "I'll tell you that He will bring about justice for them speedily." There's that same concept, next, quickly, soon. "However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith in the earth?" What does that mean? It means the delay could be so long that people will begin to believe He's not coming at all. It's near, it's next, but it could be delayed so long people will question whether He's ever going to come. Boy, did the scoffers ever pick up that, didn't they? It wasn't but just a matter of a very few months and they were saying, "Where is the sign of His coming?" He hasn't come, 2 Peter. But He's coming. There is no question about it, and His coming is next in redemptive planning. And don't you let this one fact escape your notice that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. It's been two thousand years, that's two days to God. He's coming.

Now that brings us to a tenth point. This is wonderful, still in the introduction. It's trinitarian benediction. Frankly, this is so overwhelming that there needs to be some note of praise at the very beginning, and we're going to see that in a moment. But before the praise comes—we may have to wait until next week to get into it actually—we need to look at the benediction that comes in verses 4, 5 and 6. This takes this great truth of the coming of Christ and presses it to us again as verse 3 did with the idea of blessedness. Verse 4: "John, to the seven churches that are in Asia"; that's Asia Minor, modern Turkey, seven churches located there in the western half of Asia Minor. They're named in verse 11, do you see them there? Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea; they were the direct, earthly recipients of this letter. And we'll study those

seven cities and those seven churches in detail as we get into chapters 2 and 3. Then the standard greeting to them, "Grace to you and peace." And here comes the unbelievable, trinitarian benediction, this is just God pouring out on us His love. Grace, “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 the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood, and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father." Stop right there.

This is the Trinity, folks. This thing begins with an unbelievable benediction from the Trinity. Benediction means blessing. Here comes grace and here comes peace from the whole Trinity to these seven churches and the true believers in them and all true believers. So this is a love letter. God's sending you His blessing. The Holy Spirit is sending you His blessing. Jesus Christ is sending you His blessing. All three members of the Trinity are sending you grace and sending you peace. It's, listen, it's their wish for you that you have grace. It's God's wish; it's the Spirit's wish; it's the Son's wish. It's their wish that you have peace. It's God's wish; it's the Spirit's wish; it's the Son's wish. I'll promise you one thing, if they wish it you'll get it; the blessedness of this.

First God is identified: "From Him who is and who was and who is to come." That's the eternal God, the source of all blessing, all grace and all peace, and I cannot resist showing you something very fascinating. It sees God in time dimensions though He is timeless because that's the only way we can understand Him. He is eternal, He was, He is, He is to come, looking at the past, the present, and the future. This title is used many times. Look at verse 8; again God is described as the One who is, who was and who is to come, the Almighty. Look at chapter 4, verse 8, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come." Chapter 11 verse 17, second part of the verse, "We give thanks to Thee, O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who wast." What? Something missing, what is it? "Who is to come" is missing? Why? Because by the time you get here, guess what? He's come. Chapter 16, it's not future anymore. Chapter 16 similarly, verse 5, "I heard the angel of the waters saying, `Righteous art Thou, who art and who wast, O Holy One.'" Isn't that great? He's come, so we don't have to say “who is to come” anymore. This is the eternal God who is sending us grace and peace.

Then John moves to the second member of the Trinity, verse 4, "And from the seven Spirits who are before His throne." You say, "Now wait a minute, I thought there was one Holy Spirit." There is, there is. You say, "Well why is it seven Spirits here?" Well, several possible answers to that. One is that seven is the number of fullness and so He is identifying the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Another is that back in Isaiah, chapter 11 and verse 2 there is a wonderful statement about the Holy Spirit there. It says, "And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." There you have seven aspects of the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of the Lord, the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of understanding, the spirit of counsel, the spirit of strength, the spirit of knowledge and the spirit of the fear of the Lord.

That's the seven-fold ministry of the Spirit.

It is also possible that Zechariah could be in the mind of God as this greeting is sent. Zechariah, chapter 4, and I won't take the time to go in to it in detail, but it is possible that the idea of the seven spirits goes back to Zechariah, chapter 4, verses 1 to 10. In verse 2, "'What do you see?' And I said, 'I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, and its seven lamps on it with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps that are on the top of it.'" Now here is this seven: seven lamps. Have you ever seen a Jewish menorah with the curves? There are seven candles, one in the middle and three on each side. They have one out in front of the Knesset, a huge one in Jerusalem, that's the Parliament. In verse 10, again the similar idea; the seven are the eyes of the Lord which range to and fro throughout the earth. You say, "Well now, could this be a reference to the Holy Spirit?" Yes, it could be, because right in the middle of this passage is this statement, "Not by might, nor by power, but [What?], by My Spirit," verse 6.

Revelation 4 and 5, frankly, carry very similar symbolism to Zechariah 4. And the Holy Spirit's work is very prominent in Zechariah, chapter 4. And so there is a connection there. If you look at Revelation 5:6 it talks about the seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits. That's almost an interpretation of Zechariah 4. Zechariah talks about seven lamps; that is the light of God. It talks about seven eyes, which are the Spirit. You see almost the same thing in chapter 5, and so it might be that the best connection is to Zechariah, chapter 4. In any case, whether it is the fullness of the Spirit, the seven-fold Spirit of Isaiah 11, or that seven-lamps, seven-eyes concept of Zechariah 4 repeated in Revelation 5, this refers to the Holy Spirit. And so, wonder of wonders, again we say it is the Holy Spirit in all His glory, the Holy Spirit in all His fullness who sends us grace and who sends us peace. Isn't this wonderful? If we belong to the church, if we belong to God, if we belong to Christ, the Father and the Spirit are sending us their wishes for grace and peace. And then John moves in to the remaining member of the Trinity. Grace and peace from Jesus Christ, verse 5, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth; what a glorious description, absolutely thrilling.

And he takes a little more time with Christ then he did with the Spirit or with the Father because, after all, Jesus Christ is the theme. He does dominate the book. The entire book is a vision of Christ sent to the persecuted, disheartened Christians in Asia Minor who were suffering immensely. And this was to encourage them about the future. And the first thing that would encourage them would be that God the eternal One hadn't forgotten them, but sends them grace and peace. The second thing that would encourage them would be that God the Holy Spirit loves them and sends them grace and peace. He hasn't forgotten them either. And the third and most wonderful, that the Son, Jesus Christ, hasn't forgotten them. He too sends them grace and peace. And who is He? John says He is the faithful witness, the faithful witness. Isaiah 55:4 prophesied that the Messiah would be a witness to the people. A faithful witness is one who always speaks the truth and Christ always speaks the truth, always the faithful witness, never deviates from what is true. In fact, in chapter 3, verse 14 He is

called “the Amen, the faithful and true witness.” God said of Him in Psalm 89, "He is a faithful witness," and I believe that this message right here about Christ comes out of Psalm 89. If you read Psalm 89, verse 27 and 37, it's all right there. Messiah will be a faithful witness. "To this end I was born," said Jesus, John 18:37, "For this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth." Jesus is sending His testimony here in this book and He is a faithful witness.

The second title he gives Him is "the firstborn of the dead." What does he mean? Firstborn doesn't mean He's the first one ever to be raised from the dead. No, others had been raised in time before Him. But it means of all those who were ever raised He is the preeminent one. Firstborn, *prototokos*, means preeminent; that of all who have ever been raised before or after, He is the preeminent one. Again that's from Psalm 89, verse 27, "I shall make Him My firstborn,” that is, My inheritor. This book is the story of that event. This book is the testimony of a faithful witness. This book is the story of God exalting the *prototokos*, the chief of all who have ever been, whoever will, be raised from the dead.

And then he gives Him a third title, "the ruler of the kings of the earth." The word *ruler* is *archon*. It means ruler. Some translations are *prince*. But *ruler*, a more generic term, is better. He will make Him the ruler of the kings of the earth. In fact, in Revelation 19:16, He will be King of kings and Lord of lords. And what a King He is! O my! Daniel 4:37 calls Him “the King of heaven.” Matthew 2:2, the “King of the Jews.” John 1:49, “the King of Israel.” First Timothy 1:17, the King of ages. Psalm 24:7, “the King of glory.” Revelation 15:3, “the King of the saints.” And finally: “The King of kings.”

Now look at those three. Faithful witness speaks of His past. To what God has to say in the past, He gives faithful witness. Resurrected Lord: that is the *prototokos*, the chief of all who have ever been raised, is His present role. And ruler of the kings of the earth: His future. He witnesses faithfully to the truth of God. And so His witness is true. He presently, in resurrection glory, is the chief of all who have ever been raised and therefore sits at the right hand of the Father. And some day in the future will be the ruler of all the kings of the earth. And we shall see all of that future glory unfold. It is also true that He will become that ruler because He is the chief of all who have ever been raised, and He will become that ruler because He has been a faithful witness. This is remarkable, for in this wonderful letter the Trinity sends us a benediction.

And that leads us to a last perception. We have seen the essential nature of the book, the central theme, the divine source, the specific recipients, the prophetic character, the supernatural delivery, the human agent, the spiritual blessedness, the compelling urgency, the trinitarian benediction. Here's the last one: its exalted doxology. John can't contain himself, he just can't. I mean, he's only into this thing six verses and he can't contain himself. And how does he wrap up verse 6? "To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever." Why does he say that? Because Jesus Christ, look at it, is the One “who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood—and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father [and thus]—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” This is an exalted hymn of praise. It is unto “Him who loves us,” present tense, please,

present tense, abiding love. Paul said nothing will separate us from the love of Christ. God's love is not a past experience. It is a present reality. And His love for us at this present moment is in as full a force as it was when Jesus died on Calvary. He loved us when we hated Him, and He keeps on loving us now that we belong to Him. He loves us.

And in the past, at the cross: “released us from our sins by His blood.” Blood, there: a term referring to His entire atoning work. When you see the reference to the blood of Christ in Scripture, it is a reference to His full atonement. Blood signifies death, and in the case of Christ, sacrificial, substitutionary death for sin. Through His death, His atoning work on the cross, He released us from our sins. My, what a great truth!

It wasn't just a negative thing. It wasn't just what He saved us from. But look at the positive in verse 6: “Made us to be a kingdom.” What does John mean by that? Well, we constitute a kingdom now. We have a King and we have common life under that King, under His authority. This is a collective designation for all believers. We who believe are all in this sphere of God's rule through Christ, and that kingdom is entered by faith in Jesus Christ. He loves us. He loves us so much that He released us from our sins through His blood, through His atonement on the cross. He loves us so much that He made us into a community of saints forever, bound together in the confines of a kingdom over which He rules; and we enjoy His loving rule and His loving sovereign, almighty protection. He has given us, as it were, the privilege of being ruled by the King of kings and reigning with Him.

Furthermore, says John, He made us “priests to His God and Father.” Having been released from our sins we have become a kingdom, a part of a kingdom we've entered by faith; we're under His rule. We have also become priests. What does that mean? We now have direct access to God, do we not? A priest is one who had the right to enter God's presence. In Israel, the priest and the priest alone could go into the Holy Place. And once a year, the high priest into the Holy of Holies where God was. We now are all priests. That's why we say we believe in the priesthood of believers; we all enter into the Holy Place. We all have access to God. Oh what a Savior we have! No wonder John says, "To Him who loves us and who released us from our sins by His blood, and then made us to be a kingdom” over which He rules, and made us priests who have immediate and direct access to God the Father, “to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever." What does he mean? He means this One who has given us all of this has the right to everlasting praise, everlasting glory, everlasting sovereignty. That's what the word *dominion* means. In fact, it would be an internal injustice if He didn't get the glory and He didn't get the dominion forever and ever.

And then he adds that wonderful solemn response, amen. That means, "Let it be.” Let it be. And so does John conclude his introduction and so does he sweep us into the future to grasp the richness of this incredible book. And he can't even get out of his introduction without being lost in praise. This book, beloved, will give to the One who loves us and the One who released us from our sins by His blood, the One who made us into a kingdom and made us priests before God, this book will give to

Him the glory and the dominion that He deserves forever and ever. And I believe that having understood it, we will all reach a brand new and exalted level of capability to praise Christ. And so we can say with John, a hearty amen.

Father, we thank You for opening the door to this book tonight, and we are ready to go through, we are ready to enter. We're already singing the praises of Christ. We are all ready to say He deserves the glory and He deserves the dominion. We are ready to sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." We're ready to do all of that and we've only just begun. Fill our hearts, Father, with anticipation of what we shall learn when we see the glory of Christ to come. And we pray in His name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).