

Revelation
Salutation & Dedication
Revelation 1:4-6
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Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas

As we come to the book of Revelation, chapter 1 verse 19, provides a framework a kind of outline for the book. If you look at verse 19 it says, “Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.”

In light of that, here is an outline of the book. You have “The things which you have seen”: The setting of Jesus’ prophecy, chapter 1 verses 1 to 20; “The things which are”: The state of Jesus’ church, chapter 2 and 3; and then “The things which will take place”: The stages of Jesus’ final triumph, beginning in chapter 4 verse 1, running through chapter 22 verse 5. And then you have “The epilogue”: the end of chapter 22. We are studying “The things which you have seen”: The setting of Jesus’ prophecy. It begins as we've noted with an introduction to the book, the first 8 verses of chapter 1. The last couple of times we've been considering the preface, verses 1 to 3.

Tonight, we come to the next part of the introduction of this book. I’ve entitled it the “Salutation and Dedication,” verses 4 through 6. By the way, let me just tell you that there's a lot of introductory material to cover in these early verses and this early part of this chapter. We won't be taking this pace through the entire book. We'll be picking up the pace as we get moving but it's so important to lay this foundation and lay it well. Let's read together our text for tonight, Revelation chapter 1 verses 4 through 6.

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: 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

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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—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

In these three verses, John introduces his letter: he greets his readers and he announces the book's dedication, so let's look at these components together. It begins very simply with the book's salutation. Like the rest of the letters of the New Testament, in these verses we learned that Revelation is also a letter—a letter composed to churches. Like other first century letters, it includes the name of the writer. In fact, first century letters began with the name of the writer rather than ending with them as ours do. And then he addresses those to whom the letter is sent. And finally, there is a greeting. In the first century there would have been a basic greeting. John takes that and expands upon it and deepens it in profound ways as we will see.

So first then as we look at the salutation, we meet its human author, verse 4 begins: “John.” As I noted for you, four times in Revelation, the writer identifies himself as John: here in chapter 1 verse 1 and verse 4 and verse 9 and again at the end of the book in chapter 22 verse 8. As I've already shown you and I'm not going to go back through that the overwhelming evidence is that Revelation was written by the apostle John the son of Zebedee, the brother of James, the cousin of Jesus, one of the twelve apostles, the disciple whom Jesus loved, the author of the gospel of John and the New Testament letters that are entitled 1, 2 and 3 John.

He simply introduces himself as John. He was so well known to these churches that it was unnecessary for him to identify himself in any other way than that simple first name “John.” Clearly the authority with which he writes this letter shows that he was also their leader. All of that points to our conclusion that in fact the author of this letter is John the apostle.

Now next we come to its intended readers. Its intended readers. Notice verse 4 goes on to say, “John to the seven churches that are in Asia.” The geographical term “Asia” refers to the Roman province that occupied what we now refer to as Asia Minor or in modern terms western Turkey. John addresses this letter to seven churches that are in Asia. Now clearly these are not

hypothetical churches. They're not symbolic churches. They're not metaphorical churches because they're all listed down in verse 11. Jesus says, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." So, these are real first century churches.

But the question is why only seven churches? There were in fact other churches in this region, for example, we know from Colossians 1:2 that there was a church at Colossae in that same area. We know from Colossians 4:13 that there was a church at Hierapolis, and we know from Acts 20 verse 5 and following, there was a church in Troas, all cities in that area. So why these seven? Well, several reasons have been suggested. Let me just give them to you. First of all, some have proposed that John uses the number seven with symbolic significance throughout his letter and so here he writes to seven real literal churches but only seven to give the meaning of completeness or perfection. In other words, even though these were literal churches he chose only seven of them in order to imply that this letter is for all churches in that entire area and everywhere. There may be some truth to that.

A second reason that's been offered is these seven were the churches that John was most familiar with in that region. You remember I told you that John the apostle left Israel in the mid AD 60's and he traveled to modern Turkey and there he became a leader in those churches. After he was arrested and exiled to Patmos, Christ commanded him to write a letter back to those churches and so he wrote to the churches that he was most familiar with—these seven. That also is possible.

A third reason that's been suggested is John chose these seven churches because they accurately represented the various spiritual condition in all other churches. In other words, again, they're real churches but when you look at the different state of each of these churches you can take every church and sort of fit them in one of those categories.

Again, there may be some truth to that, but I think more likely the reason John wrote to these seven churches is that they were part of a kind of ancient postal network. In the first century,

Asia Minor consisted of these seven primary districts and at the center of each postal district was a chief city. Those seven cities served in turn as hubs for the dissemination of mail and other information. The seven cities listed in verse 11 were the key cities in each of those districts. If you start in Ephesus—and you can see Ephesus here on the—if I can mark it for you—right there is Ephesus on the coast. If you go north, you find Smyrna, Pergamum, come down to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. And so, you can see there's sort of a rough oval starting with Ephesus on the coast that would have been the sort of line through which information would have traveled, each city about 50 miles apart. And so that would have been the normal delivery route for the dissemination of information coming from the coast. It also would have been the route that this letter would have taken because coming from the island of Patmos, it would have come first to the city of Ephesus.

So, in writing to these seven churches, John was not only addressing each of these seven churches but also the churches in each of those seven districts. He intended this letter to be delivered to each of those seven cities in order and eventually to be distributed to all of the churches in the surrounding region. And as I showed you last time John intended this letter for all Christians for all time. So those are the intended readers.

That brings us to its Trinitarian greeting. It's Trinitarian greeting, verse 4, “Grace to you and peace.” I love this. I think we see this so often in the New Testament, we just sort of read over it like it doesn't matter. Folks, it matters and I hope after I explain it to you, it'll matter even more. Christians in the first century, likely originating with the apostle Paul, adapted the greetings of their day and invested them with much deeper and richer spiritual significance. Paul used this greeting, “Grace to you and peace” or some variation of it in all of his letters, except the pastoral epistles 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus and Peter also used it in his letters.

The Greeks and the Romans greeted each other with the Greek word *chairein* which means “I wish you joy” or “I wish you happiness.” Paul and other believers and here the apostle John changed *chairein* “I wish you happiness” to *charis* “I wish you grace”; “May God extend His grace to you”; “May God continue to have an attitude of favor toward you and to do good to

you,” even though you and we all deserve the opposite. What a greeting! Not “I wish you happiness” but “I wish you the favor of God”; “I wish that you would know His goodness even though you don't deserve it.”

And he adds “and peace.” Now if the first greeting was a sort of adaptation of the Greek or Hellenistic greeting, this one is the adaptation of the Jewish greeting. This was the standard Jewish greeting of both the Old Testament and New Testament eras. If I had time, I could show you references even back as far as the time of the judges where this was used. In Hebrew it's *shalom*. It was the wish that the person would experience peace or well-being in every aspect of his life and again the first century church under the leadership of the apostles adapted this expression.

What John here says is “May you experience the inward sense of peace that is the evidence and assurance that you've known God's grace.” You see how the two go together? Grace is what we need and peace is what we experience when we have confidence that we've experienced that grace.

Matthew Henry puts it this way, “Grace, that is, the good will of God towards us and His good work in us; and peace, that is the sweet evidence and assurance of this grace.” So, whenever you hear someone say, “Grace to you and peace,” know that's what they're wishing: “May God show you His grace”; “May He treat you with favor”; “May His favor rest upon you”; “May He do good to you even though you deserve the opposite”; and “May He give you peace”; that is, “May He give you the sweet confidence and assurance that you know His favor, that you are under His grace, that you stand,” as Paul puts it in Romans 2, “in grace.”

So, John begins with this greeting, “May you continue to experience the grace of God and the peace of God,” but this wasn't primarily John's greeting. Instead, John says it comes from God Himself. The source of this greeting, “Grace and peace to you” isn't John. Instead, it's the three Persons of the Trinity. Notice what he says, this greeting is from God the Father, verse 4 says,

“Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come.” That is a most unusual title for God, but it's used several times in the book of Revelation.

First, notice he describes the Father literally as “the One Being.” That's what the Greek text says, “The One Being.” That is, “the One who exists.” In the Septuagint, this is the exact form of God's name that was given to Moses in Exodus 3 verse 14, exactly it. “God is the One who is.” As I've described to you before that name means—when we speak of God as “He is”—it means that “He is self-existent”; “that He depends on nothing outside of Himself or His existence”; “that He is eternal”; “He is always the One who is”; “He is in eternity past”; “He is now and He is in eternity future”; “He is the eternal One who is.”

And it speaks of his unchangeability. In fact, one possible way to translate the name of God in Exodus 3:14—one of my seminary profs—I still remember in his gravelly voice telling us this: the name of God there could very well be translated instead of “I Am that I Am,” “I always will be what I always have been”; “I always will be what I always have been”; “I Am unchangeable.” He is the One being. The One who is.

Secondly, John calls Him “The One who was being.” Now, this is interesting because it's not the order we expect, right? I mean you'd expect him to say, “The One who was and who is and who is to come.” But that isn't what he says. He says, “The One who is,” then “the One who was,” or literally “The One who was being.” It's present tense in the past, sort of a continuous reality in the past. “He is the One who continually existed in the past.”

I love that. John is reminding us that the God we worship, the God who is described in this book, the God who has revealed these things to His Son, He is the same God that we know throughout the Scripture. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is the One who was being.

And then thirdly, he says, “He is the One who is coming.” That too is surprising. I mean, think about this with me. You would expect John to say, “The One who was, the One who is, and the

One who will be,” right? I mean, that's what you would expect. That's not what he says. He says, He's “The One who is coming.” I think that's because in the very next verse, we are promised that our Lord is coming. When the Son returns the Father will come in and through the Son to save His own and to judge all of those who oppose Him. He is the One who is coming in and through His Son. He is coming in his Son to bring human history to an end.

This is the One—don't miss the point—this is the One who is wishing you, Christian, grace and peace. It's God's desire—God the Father's desire—that you would know His favor and that you would have peace, the assurance of His favor. So, this benediction comes from God the Father.

John adds that “grace and peace” also come from God the Holy Spirit. Notice verse 4 goes on to say “Grace to you and peace from Him who is and was and who is to come and from the Seven Spirits who were before His throne.” Now first of all, it is clear that this description is pointing to the Third Member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Why? Notice where John places this person. Whoever this are—the Seven Spirits—They are between or He is between and equal to God the Father and God the Son.

In addition, this Person dispenses grace and peace to human beings. Nowhere in the New Testament do other human beings or angels, which some have said these are angels, nowhere else in the New Testament do human beings or angels give out grace and peace. This comes from only God and so clearly then this is the Holy Spirit.

But why is the Holy Spirit called the Seven Spirits? Now, first of all, let's be clear in the book of Revelation, John is crystal clear that the Holy Spirit is one Person. In fact, He is referred to that way some 13 times as one Person. One example would be chapter 3 verse 6, “He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” So clearly, We're talking about the Holy Spirit; one Holy Spirit.

But the Spirit is also referred to on several occasions in the book of Revelation as the Seven Spirits here in chapter 3 verse 1; chapter 4 verse 5; chapter 5 verse 6. Why is that? The Spirit is

referred to also as “seven lamps of fire” which points to His omnipresence in chapter 4 verse 5 and to “seven eyes” pointing to His perfect omniscience in chapter 5 verse 6.

So, what is—what does it mean in calling the Holy Spirit the seven spirits? Well, He's referred to that way for three possible reasons. First of all, it may be a reference to the seven-fold ministry of the Holy Spirit that's supposed to come through the Messiah. It's described in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament in Isaiah 11:1-2. This is what we read, “Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit.” We're talking about the Messiah.

You know, it's like David in his lineage is a tree that is decayed and rotten and has been cut down and then suddenly out of that tree comes this little stub—this little branch—you've all seen that in the woods—that's the Messiah—that's Christ. And it says, “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 the fear of the LORD.” Now if you're counting, you say that's only six and you're right. The Septuagint adds a seventh and that's why some would say that this seven Spirits of God refers to the sevenfold ministry of the Spirit through the Messiah.

A second possibility is the Spirit is associated with the number 7 to remind us of His fullness and perfection, a significance that the number 7 has throughout the book of Revelation as we will see. In other words, it's called the Seven Spirits of God to say He is the perfection of God. He is the perfect Spirit of God. And that's a possibility.

But I gravitate toward the third one, and that is, that it's a reference to the Menorah, the lampstand with seven lamps that's found in Zechariah chapter 4 verses 1 to 10, which in context refers to the Holy Spirit. I'm not going to take you back to that text because it requires a lot of extra explanation. But what's interesting we will talk about it when we get to chapter 4 verse 5 of Revelation because there, I think the same image is used when the Spirit is referred to as the “seven lamps” or the “seven torches.” And I'll deal with that more at length when we get there. But I think this is what he's talking about.

Regardless, I don't want you to miss the big point. The big point is this is the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit adds His blessing to the Father, and the Holy Spirit says to you, "Christian, may the favor of God rest upon you and may you have the confidence and assurance of that favor."

Thirdly, the blessing of grace and peace comes from God the Son, verse 5, "and from Jesus Christ." Now usually when there's a listing of the members of the Trinity, you usually have the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus appears as the Second member of the Trinity listed but John here puts Him last because of what He's about to do. Jesus is going to be the focus of the next several verses and so He puts Him last to sort of build on what He wants to say. This, by the way, is the last time that John refers to our Lord as Jesus Christ until the very end of the book, chapter 22 verse 31. John really prefers and usually uses throughout this book the simple name Jesus.

What follows here is one of my favorite New Testament descriptions of Jesus Christ and I hope before we're done it'll be yours as well. Let's look at it together. John describes Jesus here in three ways. First of all, He is the faithful witness to God's truth. He is the faithful witness to God's truth, verse 5 says, "the faithful witness." Turn over to chapter 3 verse 14, and you see this again in the message to the church in Laodicea, Jesus says to John, "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: "The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this." This is how Jesus identifies Himself: He is the faithful Witness to God's truth.

One of the great purposes of Jesus earthly mission was to witness to God's truth. Let me show you this. Go back to John's gospel, John chapter 1 verse 18, John says, "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." That word "explained" can be translated "exegeted." The Son who is God Himself who enjoys a special relationship to God of intimacy, He has exegeted God; He has explained God; He is witness to the truth about God.

Go over to chapter 3 verse 32. Again, let's start at verse 31. This is our Lord, possibly John, but the point is, it is a reference to our Lord, "He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all." Now watch verse 32, "What He"—meaning Christ—"has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. He who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true." Jesus simply testified to what He had seen and heard. That's what He came to do.

But I think my favorite reference to this, and there are a number of others through John's gospel, but turn over to John 18. John 18. Jesus is in the crucible of His last hours. He's standing before Pontus Pilate and in John 18 verse 37—go back to verse 36—"Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.' Therefore Pilate said to Him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say correctly that I am a king.'" Now watch this, "For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." And of course, Pilate's famous response, "What is truth?" Jesus said, "Everything I tell you,"

So, Jesus came to bear witness; to bear testimony to the truth and He was completely faithful in that witness to the truth. In fact, Paul in 1 Timothy chapter 6 verse 13 says, "Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate." And let me let me remind you of just how faithful Jesus was. He was faithful to speak the truth even when He knew before Pilate it would cost Him His death. He was faithful even unto death. What's interesting is that the Greek word for "witness" here is the word *martus* from which we get our English word "martyr." And a martyr is simply someone who is willing to seal his testimony with his own blood and Jesus was that.

He was a faithful witness to the truth and willing to seal that testimony to the truth with His own blood. Friends, Jesus is the faithful witness to God's truth. You know what that means practically for you? It means you can believe Him. You can believe Him. You can believe. You can put

your eternal confidence in what He has told us about Himself, about God, about salvation, about eternity and about the future of this planet. You can believe Him because He is the faithful witness from God.

There's another application of this for us and that is Jesus was a witness to God's truth and faithful in ways that you and I will never be and yet you and I are also called upon to be faithful witnesses to the truth. And even to be willing to seal our witness with our own blood if that's necessary. Look at Revelation chapter 2 verse 13, when Jesus dictates the letter to Pergamum, He says this, verse 13, "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas"—now watch this—"My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells." You see, Jesus calls us to be faithful to Him, faithful to the truth and to seal that faithful witness if necessary even with our blood. That's what Antipas did and more importantly it's what Jesus our Lord did before him, and this is what men and women have done throughout the history of the church.

You know, I think all of us when we think about the possibility of that are like "I just don't know. I just don't know if I can do that, if I have the courage to do that." And the truth is you don't and neither do I. You see, again you are not the hero in Jesus' story. If you are faithful in sealing your witness to the truth with your own blood, if you're called to do that, it'll be because Jesus accomplished, as we learned this morning, His work through you. It'll be because He strengthened you. It'll be because He enabled you. That's your only hope. That's my only hope but that's what we're called to be. Our Lord is a faithful witness to God's truth. Friends, you can believe Him. You can believe everything He's told us. "What is truth?" Pilate said. If that's your question, the answer is what Jesus said: He's the faithful witness.

Secondly, John describes Him as the conqueror and ruler of death. Notice verse 5, He is "The firstborn of the dead." The word "firstborn" can be used of the one who is first chronologically and that's true of Jesus. Jesus was the first to experience, listen carefully, lasting resurrection. I mean, Lazarus and others before him were raised from the dead even in the Old Testament but only temporarily. They all eventually died. But in Jesus case, He rose from the dead forever.

Look at chapter 1 verse 17, “When I saw him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore.’” He is the firstborn from the dead in the sense that He is the first who defeated death forevermore. Eternally alive.

“Firstborn” is also used in the New and the Old Testament of the one not chronologically first but the one who is most important—the preeminent one. For example, Colossians 1:18 “He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.” He’s the preeminent One. Jesus was the first to truly rise from the dead to everlasting physical life and of all of those who have or ever will rise from the dead He is the most important One. The preeminent One.

But don't miss the key point here. The main point: Jesus rose from the dead. He came out from the dead. He rose to new and glorious life. He conquered death forever. He is therefore the ruler over death. Look again at chapter 1 verse 17, “I am the first and the last,”—verse 18—“and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.” And what's the implication of that? The end of verse 18, “And I have the keys of death and the grave.” I have the authority; I have the right; I have the control; I have the sovereignty. Death no longer rules. Christ rules. Christ decides who lives, who dies and how and when. He is sovereign over it all.

Folks, this is a great comfort, this is a great comfort to those facing persecution like the believers in the first century—the Christians to whom John wrote this letter were facing escalating persecution, and even as we saw, the threat of death itself. What could be more comforting than to know that our Lord was killed in His faithful witness to the truth. And then He conquered death forever.

So, if being a faithful witness leads to your death and my death, we serve One who rules death; who owns death; who has the keys of death and the grave; who says who lives; He says who dies; and He says who is raised again forevermore.

It says also this truth is a great comfort in death, both our own death and the death of those we love. I come to this passage often, in fact, if you've had a family member die, there's a good chance I've brought you to this passage because my own mind comes here often. You know people live, people in our world, live in the fear of death. I was just Friday at the home of one of our members who was in hospice who just went to be with the Lord, and his family was telling me that even the hospice worker was sharing with them that they were really amazed at the confidence with which he faced death. Why? because most people live as Hebrews says, "in fear of death" all their lives. Folks, we don't have to live in fear of death because death is not the product of chance or fate or accident or rogue cancer cells or flawed genes or some random event. The timing and circumstances of our death and the deaths of those we love are the personal decision of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the conqueror and ruler of death. "I have the keys," He says, "I have the keys."

Thirdly, John described Him as the Supreme Sovereign over earth's kings. The Supreme Sovereign over earth's kings, verse 5, "and the ruler of the kings of the earth." You know, God promised David that He would have a great descendant the Messiah and that descendant the Messiah would rule over all other rulers. He would be the supreme Sovereign, Psalm 89 verse 27, "I also will make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth." Daniel chapter 7 verse 14, we studied it together, to the Son of Man, to our Lord, "To Him was given dominion,"—that is sovereignty, the right to rule—"glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed." In 1 Timothy chapter 6 verse 15, Paul writes, "He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords."

It's interesting isn't it, that what Satan offered Jesus in exchange for His worship, Jesus earned by His faithful obedience. At the consummation of all things God will give Jesus the universal supreme right to rule everything. Philippians chapter 2, you remember, after it describes our Lord's humiliation, says this in verse 9, "For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name, which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus

EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” He is the Supreme Sovereign, the Supreme Sovereign. Jesus Christ is the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Now I just want you to think about that a moment. I want you to personalize that. Jesus Christ is the ruler of President Biden. Jesus Christ is the ruler of Vladimir Putin. Jesus Christ is the ruler of Xi Jinping. He is the ruler of every other ruler on earth, great or small. What that means folks is He gives them their authority. He limits their power. He restrains their wrath. He overrules their plans. He is sovereign over every detail of their lives, every decision they make, every act, every outcome and He will hold every one of them personally responsible. Understand this: every single king on this planet will stand and give an account to Jesus Christ. He is the ruler of the kings of the earth So, Jesus Christ then is the faithful witness to God's truth. He is the conqueror and ruler of death, and He is the Supreme Sovereign over earth's kings.

What an amazing salutation. Is that how you start your letters? Thomas Schreiner in talking about the fact that it's a Trinitarian blessing, observes this about the Trinity: He says, “Here we have the raw materials from which the doctrine of the Trinity was derived. The Trinity wasn't invented by the church in later ages but was formulated through careful and intense exegesis of the relevant New Testament texts. The church's deliberations and conclusions as expressed in the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds represent theological exegesis at its best.” That's what we just did; we just saw the Trinity. And if we went to other passages, we would see the Trinity as well. The Trinity is not based on Greek philosophy—it's based on the clear teachings of the New Testament. So, there we have the book salutation.

I want us to turn now, secondly, to the book's dedication. The book's dedication. Most books begin with some sort of dedication typically to someone who has influenced the author personally, or professionally and John's no exception to that. But for John the apostle there is only one Person deserving of that place of honor. Look at verse 5, “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—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” John dedicated this book to Jesus Christ—its theme.

He begins his dedication with a description of Jesus’ heart, verse 5, “To Him who loves us.” It’s interesting, this is the only place in the New Testament where this expression occurs in the present tense. Usually the New Testament says, “He loved us,” pointing back to the fact that He came or back to the fact that He died for us on the cross and, of course, that is the greatest expression as we’ll see of his love. But that’s not what he says here. John here says, “Jesus is loving us.” The point is not that He didn’t love us in the past or He won’t love us in the future, He’s only loving us right now in the moment and that’s all we can be assured of. That’s not the idea at all. Instead, what John is trying to capture with this expression is that Jesus’ love is the one constant. It’s like the north star in our lives. It never changes. His love for His own is unchanging and eternal. It’s like that expression in Psalm 103, I love it, “From everlasting to everlasting is the steadfast love of the Lord.” What John is saying here is search wherever you choose, travel in your own little personal time machine to any point in eternity past to any point in time to any point in eternity future and stop wherever you choose and wherever you stop you will find that Jesus is still loving you. That’s the point.

In eternity past when the Father gave you to the Son as a love gift, Jesus loved you. When Jesus agreed in the eternal councils of the Trinity to come to earth to accomplish your redemption to lay down His life on your behalf, He loved you. When He created the world; when He spoke in 7 days or in 6 days all that is into being on that sixth day, when He created human beings knowing that eventually you would come, He loved you. When through the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit He entered the womb of the virgin Mary in the little town of Nazareth, when the eternal God became man, He loved you.

During those 30 silent years when He worked, grew up as an infant, a child, and then worked in the family business, then took it over and worked at the work of a carpenter, those 30 silent years when He was earning the righteousness that He would one day give you as a gift. You were on His heart and mind. He loved you.

On the day that He entered His ministry and each day through those three and a half years as He taught, as He revealed the Father, He knew that He was doing so not only for those who heard Him in person but for those who would read from the apostles' writings those words as well. He was thinking of you.

His heart was on you in the Garden of Gethsemane; He knew those for whom He would offer Himself. You were on His heart through those six hours on the cross, He loved you. On the day that you were born during the years you lived in rebellion against Him and on the day that He redeemed you and brought you to Himself, He loved you. On the day of your greatest joy and on the day of your deepest and most profound sorrow and on the day of your darkest and most heinous sin, He loved you. As you sit here tonight, He loves you.

That's the point of the statement. Slice eternity or time wherever you want and you will always find Him loving you. Romans 8:38 and 39, "I am convinced that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God." And how is that love known? —"which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

John goes on to describe specific actions that Jesus has taken because He loves us. So, let's look at a description of Jesus' actions, verse 5 goes on to say, and He "released us from our sins by His blood." You want the measurement of Jesus' love? Just look at the cross if you want to know how much He loves you. Think of what He gave up and what He did to purchase you for Himself—to purchase your forgiveness. The cross, as one author puts it, is the pulpit of God's love. It's the place from which He preached His love to you in which Christ preached His love to you like no other.

But I love the way John puts it here. If you've ever taken beginning Greek, you have learned the verb translated "released." It's the verb that's in all the paradigms you've memorized. It's *luo*. It means "to loose." In the Septuagint, this verb is used to describe the pardon of sin. And in Isaiah chapter 40 verse 2, "Speak kindly to Jerusalem; call out to her, that her warfare has ended, that

her iniquity”—her guilt over sin—“has been removed.” It's been loosed. She's been set free from it.

The picture of this word is captured so beautifully in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. John Bunyan, remember, described Pilgrim as having this heavy burden, the burden, the weight of sin tied onto his back. At the moment of salvation that burden is removed. He's loosed from it—loosed from the guilt. That's this idea.

And notice our release from the guilt and the debt of sin was accomplished by means of through the instrument of the blood of Jesus. Now when Scripture speaks of Jesus' blood saving us—don't misunderstand, it wasn't that there was something magical about the physical liquid that flowed through Jesus' veins. He had human blood like your blood. There's nothing magical or mystical about that blood.

The issue was that He gave His blood, that he poured out His blood in the death of a sacrifice. That's why in Leviticus 17 verse 11, we're reminded that blood is given for life—that blood stands as a picture for the life. Why? because you can't live without your blood. When Jesus offered His blood, He was offering His life in the violent death of a sacrifice.

And so, when Scripture speaks of our being saved or loosed here from our sins, from the guilt of our sins by the blood of Christ, it means that we are saved by the pouring out of His blood in violent death; the giving up of His life to redeem ours. Because of Jesus' abiding love for us, He loosed us—He released us. He pardoned us from our sins by means of His shed blood.

How did he do that? He died in our place, enduring what we deserved so that God could be just and still forgive us. Think about it. God wouldn't have been just if he had forgiven us and not dealt with our sins any more than a judge who's constantly letting guilty criminals go free is just. God couldn't just say, “You're forgiven.” No, His justice had to be satisfied. The only way He could forgive us is if our sins were paid for and Jesus did in our place, so that God could forgive

us. Ephesians 1:7, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His grace.” Jesus loosed us from our sins.

He did so for a reason though, look at verse 6, “and He has made us to be a kingdom,”—He has appointed us or constituted us to be a kingdom. Collectively together all believers, He has made us who believe in Him to be a kingdom—we belong to His kingdom. We are His kingdom. We're the spiritual kingdom over which He rules. Colossians 1:13 says, “He rescued us”—the Father did—“from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son. We are a kingdom of people ruled over by Jesus Christ.

It's interesting, if you go back to the Old Testament in Exodus 19, God tells Israel, “You are a kingdom of priests”—a kingdom of priests. The point was you were to represent Me to the world. You are to proclaim the truth about Me to the world, and you have access to Me. That's what we're being told here: We belong to a different kingdom. Can I just say this really bluntly in the strange political situation in which we find ourselves, Christian, your primary citizenship is not American, it is the kingdom of Jesus Christ and you are part of His spiritual kingdom and He is your King and someday He will establish a physical kingdom on this planet and you, Christian, will rule with Him. Revelation 20 verse 4, they reign with Christ for a thousand years.

Notice verse 6 adds, “priests to His God and Father.” Collectively we are a kingdom but individually we are priests. We are a kingdom made up of subjects with direct priestly access to God. By the way, this underscores what theologians call the “priesthood of the believer,” that is, you don't need a priest to go to God. Jesus Christ is your Priest and because He is your High Priest, you are a priest in the sense that you have immediate access to God.

Like Old Testament priests, we enjoy that access to God, and at the same time we have the responsibility of representing Him to the people around us just like Old Testament Israel did. We are now God's witness nation, the church. We are a kingdom of priests proclaiming His offer of pardon to all who will repent and trust in Him. Chapter 5 verse 10 says, “You have made them to be a kingdom and priest to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.” Wow! He loved us; He

loves us and because He loves us, He has loosed us from our sins with His own blood, and He's made us a kingdom, and He's made us priests to His God and Father.

Finally, there is a doxology to Jesus' glory, verse 6 finishes, "To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen." Having dedicated this book to Jesus Christ, John the apostle just can't help himself. He just breaks out in doxology. He breaks out in praise.

This is the first of several such doxologies scattered throughout this book. This one is "to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever." Notice how it grows here—two realities are described in praise to God to Christ: chapter 4 verse 11, here we have three "worthy are You our Lord and our God to receive glory and honor and power." And then you come to chapter 5 verse 13, and you have "for to Him who sits on the throne unto the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." You come to chapter 7 verse 12, and you have seven "blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen" You know what we see in this? We see the reminder that as our knowledge of God and His ways grows our worship and adoration grow as well.

But notice in the first one, 1:6, John addresses it solely to Jesus Christ, which by the way, is a testament to His deity. May Jesus Christ, first of all notice, receive glory. What does that mean? May He be treated with the praise, the honor, the weightiness, the respect that He is worthy of. That's a great prayer. May Jesus Christ be treated with the weight and praise and honor and respect He is worthy of.

And may He receive the dominion—that word "dominion" has at its base the idea of power but it's power to rule. And so, it could be translated like this: "May He receive the sovereignty" or "May He receive the right to rule." So, may He receive the praise He deserves, and may He receive the sovereignty that He earned.

Notice literally, “into the ages of the ages.” That’s what the Greek text says, “into the ages of the ages,” In other words, into the ages that aren’t made up of years or decades or centuries or millennia but ages that are made up of ages. “Forever and ever.”

And then John finishes with “Amen.” This is, listen carefully, not as one of our tragically uninformed congressman apparently believes, the sexist way to end a prayer. It has nothing to do with males or females. Instead, it is a word that comes directly from Hebrew that means “to be firm.” In Jewish synagogues, it’s how people respond to the prayer of the leader. It was a regular part of Christian worship according to 1 Corinthians 14:16, Christians would end what was said with the word, the Hebrew word, “amen” or the Anglicized version “amen.” It means essentially “may it be”; “let it be so”; “let it be established”; “let it be true”; “let it be done.” Wow! What a beginning.

So how do you respond to this? Can I just give you two very brief ways you and I need to respond? Number one, in light of what we’ve seen about Jesus Christ, remember that He is worthy of your worship. Your response, Christian, should be the same as John’s: you ought to find yourself overwhelmed as we study this, as we as we think about this, as we meditate on Him. You ought to find yourself just bursting out like John, “To Him be the glory He deserves, to Him be the dominion, the right to rule forever. He’s worthy of it.” I love that song “Is He Worthy.” Is he worthy of this? Yes, He is.

This also reminds us that He’s worthy of our trust. I mean look at what we’ve just studied together about Jesus Christ. Folks, He is worthy of your trust. He’s worthy of your trust for managing your life today. If He can do all of this—if He is all of this—then just relax and trust Him. He can manage your life.

He’s worthy of your trust when it comes to your eternal salvation. He’s promised He’s the Faithful Witness. He said, “Truly the one who hears My words and believes in Him who sent Me has eternal life and He will never perish.” He’s worthy of your trust when it comes to the promises of salvation.

He's worthy of your trust when it comes to death itself. He's worthy of your trust when it comes to your eternal future. And folks, He is worthy of your trust when it comes to what's going to unfold on this planet, so stop worrying. Your Lord is the Ruler of the kings of the earth. Instead, worship. Let's pray together.

Father, we are truly amazed at what we have studied together tonight. Lord, we haven't been able to capture it all. My weak ability to communicate these things falls so short of what this passage is worthy of; of what these truths are worthy of; of what Your Son is worthy of. Father, I pray that you would take our weak and feeble efforts to understand these truths, break them and bless them and multiply them to our understanding. Lord, may we begin to taste something of the richness and the depth that is in these verses and may we like John find Jesus Christ our Lord worthy of worship and worthy of our trust.

And Lord, I pray for the one who may be here tonight who doesn't know Jesus Christ, Lord I pray that as I have exalted Him tonight in His life, in His ruling power and His sovereignty and even in His death, may they cry out to Him—the only One who can loose them from their sins through His own blood and may they experience that even tonight. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.