

The Ruler of Kings on Earth
Revelation 1:4-20

Our Bible reading thus far has provided us with several differing pictures of Jesus:

Matthew – The King of the Jews
 Mark – The Suffering Servant
 Luke – The Perfect Man
 John – The Son of God

R.G. Lee, a 20th century Baptist pastor once said,

By the coming of God in human form, Jesus, clothed the body with imperishable nobility. By Him who was made flesh, whose every muscle was a pulley divinely swung, whose every nerve was divine handwriting, whose every bone was divine sculpture, who, in kingly fashion, wore the flesh as a garment, the body has been made an instrument of Christ. Through the human mouth God in authority spoke. Through human eyes God in pity looked. Through human hands God in love wrought. Upon human feet God on errands of mercy went. Through a human heart God's compassion was shown. Through human ears God heard humanity's despairing cry.

But it is impossible to capture the infinity of Divinity in four pictures, in words or even in his incarnated form.

John, the last living disciple, has been exiled to Patmos for his witness about Jesus. This picture is all-important, not only for his immediate audience but for us also. John, who wrote the Gospel and three epistles, provides us with one final picture of Jesus, that of his exalted form.

Note: John was in exile on Patmos to get him 'out of the way.' But,

There are as many ways of looking at Jesus as there are people who look at him. Just as the Bible is the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph 3:8-9) so Christ is inexhaustible.

R.G. Lee again,

Jesus never struck a jarring note, never made a misstep. On Him circumstances left no fingerprints. Popularity never caused Him to hasten a footstep. Hostility never caused Him to falter. Temptations never loosened a moral fiber. As all the rivers are gathered into the ocean so Christ is the ocean in which all moral excellencies and spiritual pleasures meet. Even His enemies said they could find no fault in Him. Even His worst foe proclaimed Him innocent.

That's wonderful...but it isn't enough. And, there isn't enough in the Scripture either. It will take Heaven to see Jesus as he really is. And that is the view John intends to share with us in Revelation 1.

First: It is a Single Revelation – 1:1 – “The revelation of Jesus Christ...”

It is easy to get caught up in the apocalyptic nature of the book: angels and various-faced beasts, dragons, the mark of the beast, women giving birth in the sky, numerology, the sky falling, witnesses, etc.

But in reality, as with the rest of the Bible, Jesus is the theme of this book. There are many scenes about many things, but ultimately, the book of Revelation just that; a single revelation of John’s statement in v 5 – *“Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.”*

Everything else that transpires in the book is intended to support that statement.

1 – Do you want to know the truth about the world, people, end times? Jesus is “the faithful witness.”

2 – Do you want to know about forever? Is there a Heaven or Hell? Jesus is “the firstborn of the dead.”

3 – Do you want to know who oversees the world, governments, time, and you? Jesus is *“the ruler of the kings on earth.”*

As with Paul, John often breaks out in doxology at the end of some great word about Jesus. But in this book, he is immediately so overwhelmed with Christ that the book begins with praise –

1 – 5 – He loves us -

2 – 5 – He has freed us from our sins by his blood

3 – 6 – He has made us a kingdom

4 – 6 – He has made us priests to God, his Father

5 – 6 – Eternal glory and dominion are his forever

Whatever else you do as you read this letter, don’t lose sight of Jesus.

Second: It’s Provenance is Important. 1 & 7

Provenance = origin – Why did John write this book?

- a) 1 - The things that must soon take place
- b) 7 - He is coming with clouds
- c) 7 - Every eye will see him, even those who pierced him
- d) 7 - All the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him

This last statement gives us some sense of the tenor of this book. It is written to assure Christians that Jesus is overseeing our lives and future.

In spite of all the gloom and doom that occurs in this Revelation, the book is intended to be a word of hope and encouragement.

Third: A Picture of Jesus 12-16

- a) 12 - The center of everything – See also v 20.
- b) 13a – The center of time – “son of man”
- c) 13b – The ultimate Priest –
- d) 14a – Wisdom personified
- e) 14b – All-knowing – Omniscient
- f) 15a – The judge of all the earth
- g) 15b – Unstoppable
- h) 16a – He holds the whole world in his hands
- i) 16b – His Word is ultimate – For good and bad – “cuts both ways.”
- j) 16c – The sum of everything – He interprets life. We can’t understand anything apart from Christ

Why all the pictures?

- John is speaking to an audience for whom oral history is more prevalent than the written word.
- A picture is worth a thousand words

Fourth: How Jesus Describes Himself. 8 & 17-18

- a) 8a – The Alpha and the Omega – the beginning and the end of everything
- b) 8b – *Lord = kurios = master / God = theos = general word for deity*
- c) 17b – The first and the last
- d) 18a – The living one
- e) 18b – The human one
- f) 18c – The eternal one
- g) 18d – The Overcoming one – Death and Hades are personified representatives of Christ’s enemies (6:8).
- h) 19 – The author of history and time

Fifth: Jesus as the Ruler of the Kings of the Earth. 4-5

Thanksgiving and Christmas are both the happiest and saddest of times. Covid is still ravaging the globe, our friends in Europe suffering greatly. John wrote during his own 1st century crisis to bring hope and encouragement to his readers.

- a) A Monarchial Title

God chose to write the Bible during monarchial and not democratic times. One reason is that a monarchial reign best represents Jesus's reign over everything.

No one has voted Jesus to be King.

Philippians 2:9-10 - God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Daniel 7:14b - his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Jesus oversees and overrules everything. This doesn't mean that life is simple. Life is complicated and often more so because we are Christians. I mean, "How crazy is this world that God oversees." I'm often confused by Dorcas's resurrection and Peter's death (Acts 9). But what doesn't make sense to us falls within the wisdom of God's plan for history. Sometimes we are just left to say -

Romans 11:33 - Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

b) It's a Sovereign Title

Sovereignty = supreme power or authority

ILL – School traffic cop. Her 'stop' sign has the authority to make you stop but not the power. Every government may have authority, but no government has the requisite power to enforce its authority.

There is no such thing as a sovereign nation. Governments may have the authority to govern but their power is limited by knowledge, time and space.

ILL – A king cannot hear everything, be everywhere or have the power to execute justice or defend the nation in every place and at all times. But God's omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence enable him to do so. Only God is sovereign.

This means that Christ regulates what the kings of the earth do.

In Genesis 20, Abraham travelled to Gerar and told the king Abimelech that Sarah was his sister. Abimelech intended to make Sarah his wife but God intervened -

Genesis 20:6-7 - "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her. ⁷ Now then, return

the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."

God is restraining some governments and allowing others to rule as he sees fit

Luke 2:1-5 – In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

c) A Claiming Title

Matthew 28:18-19 - And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...

Because Jesus is the ruler of the kings on earth, he has the authority (right) and power (ability) to claim citizens of other countries for his own kingdom and for that claim to be *a priori*, the highest claim on a person's life.

The greatest king has the greatest claim. The first king has the first claim.

All Christians are ambassadors, emissaries of the King who is over all kings and as his representative, have the right to call people everywhere to submit to the only true king, Jesus. The kings of the earth may not presently recognize that authority but, as the history of the world reveals, no one can stop King Jesus.

Philippians 2:21 – Paul is writing from a home in Rome rented for him by the Philippians but he is under house arrest awaiting his first trial. From there he writes –

"Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household."

Trick question: How did Paul get to Rome?

Acts 26 – Paul is imprisoned by Festus, the Roman governor who confers with King Herod Agrippa II, the great grandson of Herod the Great, who murdered Bethlehem's babies. His son, Herod Agrippa 1 killed James in Acts 12. After Paul's defense of the faith in Caesarea-by-the-Sea, he appeals to Caesar in Rome.

Acts 27:1-2 And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius. ² And embarking in a ship... which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea,

How did Paul get to Rome or anywhere? He tells us in

2 Corinthians 2:14 - *But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere*

The answer is: God used King Herod Agrippa II to send Paul to Rome.

Sixth: A Triumphant Title

Matthew 16:18 – *I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

1 Corinthians 15:25 – *For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*

T - **Revelation 17:14** – *They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”*

Conclusion:

John writes the Revelation to people who are suffering persecution everywhere. It is no longer just in Jerusalem but global. He writes to tell them that Christ is

Revelation 1:5c - *the ruler of kings on earth*

Community Groups:

- 1 – What part of the Bible have you most enjoyed reading this year?
- 2 – How has reading the Bible helped you?
- 3 – What has been difficult about reading the Bible every day?
- 4 – Read verses 1 and 7. Why did John write the Revelation?
- 5 – How does knowing that the book of Revelation is a single revelation, about Jesus, change the way you interact with the book?
- 6 – Read 1:5-6 – What has Jesus done and what is most appealing to you?
- 7 – Read 1:12-16. Why did John use such figurative language?
- 8 – Work through each of the colors John uses to paint this picture of Jesus and discuss them.
- 9 – Read verses 8 and 17-19? How does Jesus describe himself?
- 10 – What does the Bible being written during monarchial times tell us about Jesus?
- 11 – How are no nations or people really sovereign?
- 12 – How is Jesus sovereign?
- 13 – Why does Jesus have a prior claim on human beings above their own earthly citizenship?
- 14 – How does Jesus as “ruler of the kings of earth” encourage evangelism and missions?