

The King of Love

November 25, 2018

Revelation 1: 4-8

⁴ John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. ⁷ "Look, he is coming with the clouds," and "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him"; and all peoples on earth "will mourn because of him." So, shall it be! Amen. ⁸ "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."



Last Sunday I spoke of how we are called to be a community of love – one that draws near to God, holds unwaveringly to our hope, spurs one another on to love and good deeds, and meets together in a variety of settings for spiritual growth. Last week I also spoke of the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf – the final and perfect sacrifice that allows us to be made right over and over so that we can always and ever enter into the presence of God. Last week the focus was on how Jesus and our faith impact us daily as we strive to follow Jesus' example. This week the focus will shift partially towards the eternal yet remain in the present also as we live and love in the now-not-yet kingdom of God. Let us pray...

My name is Vicki, and I am addicted. I am not attempting at this time to recover, though I am growing more aware of my neediness daily. I'll tell you of this obsession, which began in my childhood. My mother knew the same dependence, though I feel she is not as addicted as I am today. I wish she were. It would give us a stronger bond.

In my early teen years, I went through a brief period where I was focused on friends and fun and didn't think much about it. But then, when I got back into it — this addiction — it with was with a passion. I've gone along my whole life progressing rather than declining in dependence. Even with this steady decline of personal control of my life, a couple of years ago I made a dramatic plunge. Today, it's the first thing I think about as I gain consciousness in the morning. Without a fix, I can barely stand to face the world or leave my house. And though my mind is often on it throughout the day, in the late evening there is this resurgence — of, how do I describe it — my need for yet another fix. I often feel no peace unless I give in. Things I used to take great pleasure in — watching television, playing tennis — are often an irritating distraction to me. And even saying this, I can freely admit I'm not planning to turn back. I feel like I've only begun and I daily ache for more. I know I won't be satiated in this life and often thoughts of leaving this world provide my greatest comfort.

This power that has hold of me won't stop with me. As I tell you about my dependence, I will shamelessly try to drag you in too. I will try to impress you with truths: it will not make you ill, but healthy. It will not damage the relationships you have with others...it will heal them. It will not make you say crazy things that you'll regret... it will make you say things that will sound crazy to others. You won't care. What the others think of as sanity is mediocrity.

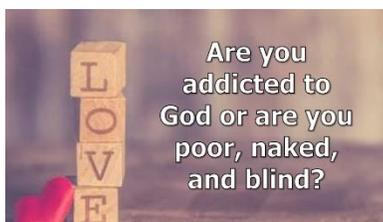
Obsession is the only life worth living. Please try my obsession. Although it is illegal in some countries, thankfully you can still legally use here.

What's it like? Mild responses can be as simple as having a good night sleep or a general sense of peace. Sometimes (and I pray this for you all) you can experience such joy, peace, even euphoria that you don't want to breathe, for fear of ending it. Although I've had this happen rarely, I can only describe it as having liquid warmth, happiness and joy wash over you. Nuclear-strength cocaine can't possibly match the buzz that my drug offers.

My drug of choice has many street names. It can be inhaled — it is the Breath of Life. You can drink it — it is Living Water. Other popular street names are: Alpha and Omega. Jesus. Prince of Peace. Almighty God.

Warning! There is no safe dosage. One encounter with this powerful Being can leave you changed forever. Where can you get this? The better question is how. The best answer is 'seek'. Want it bad. Don't stop seeking. Don't ever want anything else more. Aim to not want anything else — period. That's a good place to be.

Those who don't want to be obsessed are in denial that addiction is best: Revelation 3:17 says, "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked".



Friends, I must ask: are you addicted to God? Is God your obsession? Or are you poor, naked, and blind? It is a hard question to consider. Are you addicted to God or are you poor, naked, and blind?

Our passage today places us squarely between the anticipation of the eventual and eternal return and reign of Jesus Christ and acknowledging that Jesus is already present and that He rules and reigns our very lives in the present moment. We live in this tension between the Christ who is to come again and the Christ who is already here. Today we will begin to mine this tension. During December, this will be our focus each week as we tie the Advent themes of hope, love, joy, and peace into the realities of living “in between” Christ’s presence here right now and the time when He will return to restore all of creation.

As Christians, we acknowledge this triple reality, this idea of Christ once dwelt here as a man, is now here in the Spirit, and is yet to come in eternal glory. It is our job, if you will, to live in both expectation and with responsibility. We live with the hope of the future establishment of God’s kingdom with the return of Christ. We also live the present reality of seeking and doing the work of Christ in our day and time. And we also recognize the truths and promises that we find in the Bible as we study the life and witness of Jesus the man. Thus, we live with eyes fixed on the future, with hands active in the present, and with a faith built upon the Word of God. All of this is found in today’s passage from Revelation.

Our passage today begins with John greeting the seven churches in Asia on behalf of Jesus himself. John describes Jesus as, “*who is, and who was, and who is to come*”. John is identifying Jesus as present, past, and future. This is ‘when’ Jesus exists – from the beginning to the end. This is again repeated at the end of our passage when Jesus Himself claims to be the “*Alpha and Omega*” –

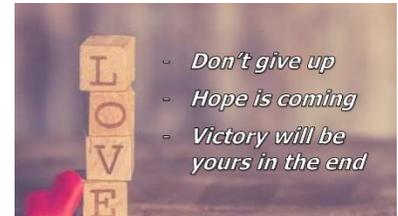
the first and the last. In the beginning of our passage, in verse 5, John also identifies 'what' Jesus is. John identifies Jesus as, "*the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth*". These three descriptors also contain the "was, is, and will be" language from verse 4. During his ministry here on earth, Jesus was the faithful witness to God. Jesus was obedient to God, following God's will and way all the time. Jesus, in the person of the Holy Spirit, continues to be a faithful witness to us - guiding us and leading us and teaching us, convicting us and redirecting us.



As we discussed last week, at the end of His time on earth, Jesus was obedient to death on the cross. He died. But Jesus did not remain in the grave. No!! He was raised to new life as God resurrected Jesus after three days in the tomb. As such, Jesus was the firstborn from the dead – the first to move from earthly body to eternal being. Jesus is just the first of the reborn. All who profess Jesus as Lord and Savior will one day be born again into eternal life as well. The last statement – "*the ruler of the kings of the earth*" – is a little less clear perhaps. In Romans 13, Paul writes, "*there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God*". All rulers are ordained and established by God. This does not mean that all rulers are godly rulers though. We do know that all are in that particular office for a reason, placed there by God, even if we do not see that at the time. In the end, when Jesus returns, He will establish His rule over all nations and all peoples. Every knee – rulers and all – will one day kneel before the One King, this king of love.

The letter of Revelation was written to the seven churches in Asia at a time of great persecution and turmoil. To hear that Jesus was the ruler of the kings of the earth must have been hard to hear for the people in these churches. Christians and the churches they were a part of were under severe persecution from the Roman Empire. People who made open professions of faith in public were being killed. The church had to meet in secret. They gathered in constant fear of being discovered. They lived as disciples of Christ, always under threat of death. This is the context into which the book of Revelation was written. This was their reality.

Yet within this reality, John also developed another theme. It runs through this book. John was conveying a simple message to the Christians and the churches living in the violence and chaos of life within a pagan world: don't give up, hope is coming, victory will be yours in the end. Through John, Jesus was encouraging them to have patience, to endure suffering, to persevere. This was Jesus' message to the persecuted Christians living in these seven communities: don't give up, hope is coming, victory will be yours.



This remains Jesus' message to Christian's everywhere. To those living today in Muslim countries, where Christians are dying for their faith, the message is the same: don't give up, hope is coming, victory will be yours in the end. To those who have recently suffered both human and property loss in wildfires, tsunamis, and earthquakes, the message is the same: don't give up, hope is coming, victory will be yours in the end. To those who are caught in the vice of

addictions or trapped in the web of the prostitution or slavery, the message is the same: don't give up, hope is coming, victory will be yours in the end. To those who face and suffer on a regular basis because of prejudice, injustice, or abuse, the message is the same: don't give up, hope is coming, victory will be yours in the end. This is Jesus' message. But have all people everywhere heard the message?

As followers of Christ, we are called to be witnesses to the good news of Jesus Christ. We are to tell our story of what Jesus has done in our lives. As followers of Jesus, we should be people willing to walk alongside those who have given up or who feel like giving up. As disciples of Christ, we should be people who bring light and love into people's lives, restoring the hope that has faded or renewing the hope that has been lost. As people who profess Jesus as Lord and Savior, we should be people willing to carry the good news of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. Along the way we will bring the message of victory and the promise of eternal life to all who fear and dread the end. As children of the living God, once again, we live with our eyes fixed on the future, with our hands active in the present, and with a faith built upon the Word of God. Our job is to live our faith out loud, so that our lives invite all we meet to join us on this journey of faith. This idea connects into the message last week.

Last week we looked at the idea that as a community of love we are to draw near to God, to hold to our hope, to spur one another on, and to meet together. We do these things not just to stay inside our own little churches, growing in

love for one another and in our love for God. Yes, as the church, we do do these things. But it cannot stop there. It cannot stop within the walls of the church. Jesus, our King of Love, has called us to much more than what happens inside these walls. Again, the encouragement and other positives that we find within the church are all wonderful. But the walls of the church cannot and should not contain our faith. Our faith and our God are much bigger than that.



In the middle of our passage, we are reminded that we are *"made to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father"*. We were created to build the kingdom here on earth, to serve God. We were created to minister to one another. We were created to be God's love lived out loud. In doing so, we build His kingdom here on earth. To best do this we must find the people who are without faith, without hope, without a Savior. We must minister to the least, the lost, the broken, the hurting, the afflicted, the widow, the orphan, the outcast inside as well as outside of our churches. We are called to be the light and love of Jesus Christ in a broken and hurting world. By our witness, by our deeds, by our words, we are to be people who encourage, who bring hope, who share God's love with others.



In their book, The Passionate People, Keith Miller and co-author Bruce Larson, describe two kinds of people – "basement people" and "balcony people." We all know many people who are one of these types of people. The

"Basement people" are the discouragers in our lives. They may be people from our past or present, but their words go with us everywhere we go. They are the negative influences in our lives and their words go something like this: *"You can't do that."* *"That's a stupid thing to do."* *"When are you going to get it right?"* *"You will never amount to anything."* Maybe you know some of these people. Basement people divert us from our hopes and dreams. They constantly point out what is wrong, rather than what is right with us. Basement people cause a room to light up when they leave.

In contrast to them are the "Balcony People." They are people who are full of love and cheer us on. They encourage us to be loving, courageous followers of Christ. They sit in the balcony of our lives like a heavenly cheering section, saying, *"You can do it."* *"We believe in you."* *"You are special to us."* Balcony people are the great encouragers in our lives and we all need them.

Those that we encounter who are broken and hurting and afflicted, they need us to be balcony people. Those who are struggling in their lives, for whatever reason, have no shortage of basement people. Yes, we can walk the middle road. Yes, we can offer up a prayer, we can hope for the best, we can silently empathize with their struggles. Or we can be people who share love and hope and encouragement. We can be people who offer faith in Jesus Christ as the salve that heals all wounds and hurts. The question for all of us is who will we be? Will we be basement people or balcony people? The choice is ours to make.

There is no question who God wants us to be. He wants us to be people who share our faith with all we meet. When we look at Jesus, the model of our faith, we see this is how He lived His life. Jesus met every person right where they were at, regardless of the sin or struggle in their life, and He ministered to them in love. Jesus loved all people. Jesus was the king of love. As we consider our faith and the ways that we choose to live out that faith, may all we do and say bring glory to the Lord our God, He *"who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty"*, Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior. Amen.



GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) Faith has its ebb and flow. In the opening illustration, Vicki was addicted to God. How can you grow your faith - so it is more like an addiction?
- 2) Who do you know who had given up, who is without hope, who sees no future hope? Pray for God to lead you to share your faith with them.
- 3) There are simple ways to be 'balcony people'. Who do you know that you can be a balcony person for this week? Make it happen!