



Jesus is alive. We celebrated that truth last Sunday. But sometimes it doesn't take long for a celebration to wear off. One day you might be celebrating Jesus' victory and his resurrection with friends and family and the next you might be struggling just to make it through. What happens then? Easter's celebration begins to fade into the background. But what we celebrate at Easter is lasting no matter what we face. This Easter season we will be taking a look at the book of Revelation. As we do, we'll see just how the comfort, joy, and peace of Easter are there for us every day. Today as we begin our series "The Lamb of God Lives" we see one of the most important and underlying comforts of the gospel: THE LAMB OF GOD LIVES 1) TO SECURE MY FORGIVENESS.

The circumstances in which the apostle John writes this book are somewhat unusual. He doesn't write from the comfort of his home. He's in exile on the island of Patmos, a small Greek island about thirty miles out west from what we call today southwestern Turkey. He was sent there under the emperor Domitian, about the year 95 AD. John is now well along in years and is the last surviving of the twelve apostles. All the others have died for the testimony they shared about Jesus. After over 60 years of preaching about the resurrection of Jesus, John probably would have thought his work was now over. But that is often when God uses us the most! John is given a vision to share with the churches on the mainland of Asia, the area we call Asia Minor. And as we read, we see these words are not only for them, but for us.

John's letter begins with a **greeting and praise which includes several titles for God.** In just our brief look at them this morning we already will see many important truths about our living Lord. Even though John is in exile and seemingly at an end, he doesn't write of despair or loss. His introduction passes on greetings of "grace and peace." John reminds us that we have God's undeserved love, his grace. And because of that we have peace with him and each other.

That **grace and peace flows from our Triune God.** He gives a threefold description. "From the one who is, who was, and who is to come." Our God is eternal. He is the everlasting Father who has always been and always will be. "From the seven spirits before his throne." This is a title for the Holy Spirit and could also be translated "the seven-fold Spirit." The Holy Spirit is also there with the Father before the very throne of God. "and from Jesus Christ..." Right along with the Father and Spirit is the Son. All three persons of the Triune God have given us grace and peace.

The **description of Jesus here is threefold** in the work he has done as our prophet, priest, and king. He is the "faithful witness" as the one who came as the Word in the flesh and spoke the very Word of God to us. He is our priest who offered up himself for us as a sacrifice and then rose from the dead. That makes him the "firstborn from the dead." When he rose back to life to a glorified body, he leads the way for all of us who follow him because of his sacrifice. And he is our king "the ruler of the kings of the earth." When Jesus rose to life, he told his disciples "all authority has been given to me." As our king he defeated our enemies and rules over all things for us.

As if that title wasn't comforting enough for us John then titles Jesus with a **threefold description of praise to him** for who he is and what he has done for us. "to him who loves us." I don't know about you, but I can't think of a more comforting title for God than "the one who loves us." To know that if you are exiled, suffering loss, feeling alone, left to struggle, is always bearable when you know that you are loved. When you face your darkest hours you want to know more than someone might be there to hold your hand, help you, or visit you. You want to know that someone loves you. God loves you. That's Jesus' title "him who loves us." How much does he love us? The second part of that title captures the measure of that love "who has freed us from our sins by his blood". He loves us so much that he took on human flesh to redeem us. He gave up that life and blood to make the payment for us. And as a result we have been forgiven and set free from our sins. That's a love worth praising him for! That's a love to find comfort in! And even better than to feel loved is to feel like you are significant to the one who loves you and important to him. And when you start to feel worthless, feel insignificant, or the world puts you down then remember the third part of this threefold praise of Jesus. "he has made us to be a kingdom and priests." This is not just a patronizing coddling love which looks down on us. This is a love which has valued us and lifted us up to the highest position in the universe. We are the people made to serve our God as his priests! Our very selves are now vessels of worship and thanksgiving. We are not insignificant. We are part of his kingdom, priests, freed from our sins, loved by God.

The one who loves us, freed us, and values us will come back for us. John then caps off his tremendously comforting introduction with a **threefold reminder of Jesus' coming.** At his coming again "every eye will see him." There will be a resurrection of all the dead. You and I will not remain in our graves but will hear his voice and be raised on the last day. We will see the living Jesus. No one will miss out on that resurrection not "even those who pierced him." Then the prophecy of Zechariah (chapter 12) will be fulfilled in full: "They will look on the one they have pierced" and "all the people of the earth will mourn because of him." Even after a lifetime of struggles and waiting, John recalls the words of Jesus, "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the peoples of the earth will mourn; and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (Mt 24:30) He's coming! Don't forget it!

We could spend a lot more time with many more truths worth mentioning in these few verses. But **when you consider all these truths what John writes next is very striking.** He doesn't look like someone who is freed, who is a priest of God, who is loved. He doesn't look like someone waiting for the return of his glorious king. He writes "I, John, your brother and companion in the

suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” (1:9) Did you catch that? He describes his own situation while writing as “suffering...” and one of “patient endurance.” And although I said his situation while writing was unusual, John actually says it is not. The fact that he must suffer and must patiently endure is not unusual. It is something the seven churches he writes to were very familiar with. It is something which every Christian becomes familiar with over their lifetime. John says he is a “fellow companion” of the suffering and patient endurance he has as a follow of Jesus. We are with him in this position. We are with him as fellow sufferers and fellow patient people who are enduring under suffering. We don’t always look like we are loved, freed, and highly significant to God. We don’t always look like those waiting for the return of our living and glorious king.

What happened to the victory of Jesus on Easter? What happened to the John who saw Jesus alive in the flesh 60 years earlier? Why didn’t glory follow? He’s exiled. He’s the remaining last apostle who hasn’t yet been killed for his testimony. **Like all of us he’s someone who must endure patiently. That’s what the life of a Christian is like.** Yes, we burst out in with John in a three-fold praise on Easter Sunday, but then what happens come Monday? It can feel like a ten-fold crash. If you’re like me, you get slammed with a sinus infection that leaves you in physical pain. If you are like other believers who worshipped here on Easter Sunday, you face separation from family who are suffering. If you are like some of us, you grieve the loss of loved ones because the pain is still so near it forces tears. If you are like any of the Christians John writes to you struggle with guilt because of your life and your failure to follow Jesus as you know you ought. You struggle with the weight of the world, with temptation, and with the devil’s constant attacks on your faith. I’m sure that before John wrote this letter he struggled to patiently endure. If you haven’t found some struggle since Easter it will come into your life. “Does God love me? Will I stand before him as his when he returns or will I rise and mourn because of my sin and guilt, my failures to endure patiently while I waited for him?”

That’s why at the onset of this vision God gave John just the vision he needed. John sees that the Lamb of God lives! And that gives him and us the strength to endure and the comfort and peace we need to assure us: our forgiveness is secure!

John has a vision in which he sees seven golden lampstands, which we find represents the seven churches his letter was first sent to. Though those churches faced temptation, guilt, struggle, and persecution, Jesus was still walking among them. The title for Jesus, “someone like a son of man,” is one he often gave to himself. It refers to both his human nature and his divine. He is the fulfillment of prophecy as the only one who looked like a son of man but would be worshipped. He was wearing a royal robe and a golden sash -both images of his royalty and his position as our great high priest. Jesus, though he took on human flesh, is the royal and living king. His hair is white like wool. This symbolizes purity and wisdom. Jesus is the sinless one who, as true God, knows all things. The blazing fire of his eyes brings to mind his holiness as judge. He sees all evil and stands as the living judge of all. Nothing can escape his sight. No one can remain unscathed as they attempt to evade his judgment. His feet like bronze glowing in the furnace emphasizes what the prophets long ago mentioned at the sight of a holy God -a fire burns at his feet and consumes. His holiness is fierce and not to be meddled with. The sound of his voice when he walked this earth was gentle and lowly. Now as the glorified and living Lord his voice was like the rushing of waters. If you’ve ever stepped near some rapids flowing at its greatest height and might you know what that sound does. It drowns out all other voices and overwhelms. In his hand, Jesus holds the seven stars. We’ll see in our series on Revelation that numbers are significant and convey meaning. Seven is a number used to convey God’s interaction with us. The stars are his people who he has made to be a light shining in this dark world. Jesus holds the church in his hand. We are in his care. And when you see his mouth a double-edged sword comes out. This is what Scriptures call “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” From Jesus’ mouth comes both law and gospel to accomplish his powerful purpose by the power of the word of his mouth. And the very face of Jesus once bloodied, beaten, and buried in the tomb without life, is now glorious and shining bright. The lamb that was once slain is now living!

This awesome vision of Jesus is for our comfort. When John sees this vision of the living Jesus in glory he falls down in fright as though dead. **Who can stand in the presence of such a God? We can.** By his Word he changes everything for John and for us: “Do not be afraid.” Jesus is the eternal one. And so that we don’t misunderstand, he is also the one who entered into our world and into time. “I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!” (Re 1:18)

This vision sustained John, and was sent to encourage and sustain the rest of God’s church. Through all the waiting and patient endurance they would feel like they only followed the one who died. But that was not the case. Nor will it ever be. Jesus is the Living One. He died and is alive again and he lives forever and ever! When you feel alone, at a loss, or in an impossible struggle, then remember this vision: Jesus is alive. And more than that he is glorious, reigning in power and might, and his Word is still going out with power. He holds his church in his hand. And he is alive to rule for us forever!

That means we stand “freed from our sins by his blood.” Jesus reminds us of that important truth as he tells John “I hold the keys of death and Hades.” Jesus is Lord of life and death. He commands the abode of the dead and of the living. Toss onto that glorious picture of the living Jesus him holding the keys. We heard him say to his disciples, “Peace be with you... If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them...” He has the keys, the authority to forgive sins. And he has forgiven yours and mine. He loves us. He has freed us. And he is alive! What else could ever matter? When you say, “I forgive you” or hear it from another Christian those are not idle words. They have the backing and authority of the one who loves us, freed us by his blood, made us his own, and lives forever our glorious king. I invite you to join me for the rest of this Easter season as we continue further in this letter to find further comfort, joy, and peace for today and eternity. This Easter season keep that vision of the Lamb of God before your eyes. He lives! He has secured your forgiveness!