



Dear Church
Revelation 1:4-6
GCSP - 07/11/2010

What is it about receiving mail that captures our attention? Even if we are not expecting something in particular or anything at all, we tend to have a certain measure of excitement when we get mail. And you can transfer this same excitement into our modern times with email and text messages; the same excitement that used to be reserved for what the postman delivered is now also delivered through cyberspace and via the airwaves between cell phone towers.

When email first became popular, America On Line, better known as AOL, was one of the first to exploit the new technology. They understood this phenomenon and excitement that we feel when receiving mail, and they keyed in on that by having their email program speak out the words, "You've got mail!"

A remake of an old Jimmy Stewart movie called "The Shop Around the Corner" was immensely popular not too long ago with the new title of "You've Got Mail." The original movie was based on pen pals sending mail back and forth the old fashioned way through the postal service. The remake, starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan, used email. Both keyed in on the excitement and anticipation of receiving mail from someone they had never actually met before, but were developing a relationship with via the words they wrote or typed.

One of the first things I do every morning is check my email and the messages I receive on Facebook. Rarely does a day go by that I do not stop by the mail box we have in Stage Stop to pick up the conventional mail we receive, even though it mainly consists of bills and junk in our modern times. I know a couple who live in one of the mountain subdivisions, like many of us in this congregation do, who bought a motorcycle for the express purpose of driving back and forth to their mailbox on a daily basis, in order to save on the gas expense that their car used up. Many people pay to have their email sent to their cell phones so they can receive their messages instantly instead of waiting until they are home in front of their computer.

We love to receive mail. I guess in some ways it makes us feel special or acknowledges our existence in some way; other people in this world care enough to communicate with us. It is almost inconceivable that we would have a letter, or an email, or a text message from someone who genuinely loves us, and ignore it for an extended length of time. It's almost inconceivable that we would ignore these things from someone who doesn't genuinely love us; yet we do it all the time.

The Bible you own is a series of letters, personal letters, love letters, from our Lord. Every letter, every paragraph, every sentence, and every word, is literally dripping with the love and passion and care the Lord expresses to you and to me. Yet we are typically much more excited about checking our email or our text messages than we are about checking what our Lord and Savior has to say to us.

The Book of Revelation is a letter; it is a letter written to seven specific churches in Asia during the first century, but it is also a letter written to every genuine church today, and to every genuine believer today.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of the **Revelation**.

Revelation 1:4-6

Let's pray.

v. 4a

The Lord chose the Apostle John to write down the things He wants communicated to the seven churches, and to us. The churches will be identified in the coming weeks as we study chapters 2 and 3, and I will give you some brief information on each when we get there, but for now I want you to grasp the indisputable fact that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, has a message, a letter, an email or a text if you will, and it is important and urgent and something you simply cannot ignore.

v. 4b

"...**Grace to you...**" By the leading of the Holy Spirit, the Lord gave me the name, Grace Church, when Kevin and Tricia Lane, and Connie and I were discussing planting a church in this area. Grace was one of those "churchy" words that just sounded and felt right. But beloved, it wasn't until I was preparing this sermon that I actually studied out what the word grace fully means.

The Greek word is "*charis*," which means, that which gives pleasure, well-being, benefit, joy, and happiness. So when the Lord, through the pen of the Apostle John, says, "**Grace to you,**" He is pronouncing everything to you from heaven that produces your pleasure, your well-being, your benefit, your joy, and your happiness. And this is not just a somewhat meaningless greeting, like saying hello, or how are you, or greetings; this is the proclamation of immeasurable blessing on you from the One who is more than able to produce these blessings in your life.

Someone once created an acronym from the word grace: God's Riches At Christ's Expense. That is an accurate rendering of what grace means. When the Lord pronounces His grace to you, He is pronouncing all of God's riches to you; both here and now, and in eternity.

As we completed our study of the Book of Hebrews this past Wednesday evening, the writer of Hebrews ended the letter with the words, "**Grace be with you all**" (**Hebrews 13:25**). We briefly discussed how casually we tend to greet one another and how we say goodbye to one another, in comparison to the depth of meaning there is behind declaring grace to each other. Even during that brief discussion I did not fully understand the fullness of what grace meant; and I am sure I still do not fully grasp the intensity of the meaning our Lord extends to each of us with this amazing word.

So this personal letter, this message, this text that expresses the unconditional and immeasurable love of God to each of you today, begins with a proclamation of "**Grace to you.**"

v. 4c

"...**and peace...**" Not only does the Lord proclaim to you grace, and all that entails, but He also proclaims peace. The full meaning of this Greek word (*eirene*) is peace, harmony, tranquility, and health.

The Old Testament equivalent is the Hebrew word “*shalom*.” Shalom is a state of well-being that puts you in harmony with God in every aspect of your life. In the Old Testament economy, shalom was only available and present in relation to obedience to the Law of God; there was no shalom, no peace, for the backslidden and disobedient. When the nation of Israel worshiped God alone and obeyed His Word, they experienced the Lord’s protection, provision, prosperity, and peace. The land produced plentiful crops, the heavens produced rains in their due season, natural pestilence like locusts stayed away, enemies did not attack, and the people lived in full health.

True shalom was connected to the blessings of the prophesized New Covenant that would come when Messiah would appear and everything would be whole again. This expression of peace is only known and fulfilled through Jesus Christ; it cannot be experienced by those outside of faith in Him.

Hold your place in **Revelation** and turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of **John**.

John 14:27

Jesus makes it clear that the kind of peace we are talking about is divine in nature; it is His peace and not anything the world can provide or experience. The peace Jesus provides for His true children is a peace that drives out all worry, all concern, all uneasiness, and all fear. It’s the peace that passes understanding, or as the NASB puts it, “**the peace of God that surpasses all comprehension**” (**Philippians 4:7**).

Turn back with me now in your Bibles to the Book of **Revelation**.

So I trust you will no longer skip over these words, “**Grace to you and peace**” and instead realize how the Lord is opening His letter to you; realizing the tremendous blessing He is proclaiming over you, and realizing that He alone has the power to bring these blessings to pass as you live under the New Covenant and walk according to the Holy Spirit in obedience to His Word.

v. 4d

“**...from Him who is and was and who is to come...**” This proclamation of blessing is from the infinite and eternal God; it is from the God who never changes. He was and He is today and He will ever be the same holy, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God. Nothing about God is depreciating and nothing about God is improving; He was and is and forevermore shall be perfect in every way. And His love for you is perfect in every way; you can never do anything to make God love you less and you can never do anything to make God love you more. Nothing takes God by surprise and nothing causes God to become worried or concerned.

As I have said many times, nothing ever happens throughout the universe that causes God to say, “Uh-oh!” God never has to say, “I didn’t see that one coming” or “What am I going to do now?” Did it ever occur to you that nothing ever occurs to God?

This is God the Father, the Almighty. But the verse doesn’t stop there.

v. 4e

“**...and from the seven Spirits which are before His throne...**” There is some speculation and some discussion as to the identity of the **seven Spirits**; there doesn’t need to be. It is

only our limited human understanding of the Holy Spirit that causes any question at all. As I mentioned during our recent series on the Holy Spirit, we have a tendency to be able to somewhat quantify or at least imagine God the Father and God the Son, but we struggle with this when it comes to the Holy Spirit. The image in our mind of the Holy Spirit is fuzzy and faceless and somewhat formless. We see the things He does in Scripture but we don't really see Him.

I told you last week that the Book of Revelation is full of symbolism, and that is why so many struggle with interpreting and understanding it properly. I also told you that every instance of symbolism is expressed in one way or another in other passages of Scripture; this aspect of the Holy Spirit being revealed in the number seven is no exception.

Hold your place in **Revelation** and turn with me in your Bibles to the Prophecy of **Isaiah**.

Isaiah 11:1-2

Here we have the Holy Spirit expressed in seven ways:

1. The Spirit of the Lord
2. The Spirit of Wisdom
3. The Spirit of Understanding
4. The Spirit of Counsel
5. The Spirit of Strength
6. The Spirit of Knowledge
7. The Spirit of the Fear of the Lord

The Book of Zechariah also references the Holy Spirit as seven. Let's read a portion of that passage as well. Still holding your place in **Revelation**, turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Zechariah**.

Zechariah 4:1-10

So don't allow the mention of seven Spirits in Revelation throw you for a loop, we will see this terminology again in the weeks to come when we reach chapters 4 and 5. We are simply seeing a different way to refer to God the Holy Spirit.

Turn back with me again in your Bibles to the Book of **Revelation**.

v. 5a

"and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth." The grace and peace come from God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, but more specifically the grace and peace come from God the Son, Jesus Christ. As I mentioned last week, the Book of Revelation is a Book that is primarily about the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in essence a gift given to Him by God the Father, and Jesus is sharing this gift with us, as we read last week in verse 1.

Jesus is identified in three ways in this passage. First, He is called the Faithful Witness.

Faithful Witness

John 1:18 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."** Jesus has been the ultimate witness for God the Father.

How many of you remember what the word witness truly means? It comes from the Greek word “*martus*” from which we get our English word “martyr.” When we are called to His witnesses, we are called to not only proclaim His name and the message of the gospel, but we are to be willing to identify with Him through persecution and martyrdom if necessary. This model for us to follow is emphasized in the next chapter.

Revelation 2:13

The only martyr who is named in this entire Book, Antipas, is called “**My witness, My faithful one.**”

Jesus was and is the ultimate faithful witness which He is called again in **Revelation 3:14** and He is our supreme example and model of what it means to be a witness for the Lord.

The Firstborn of the Dead

Jesus was the first to be resurrected with a new immortal and incorruptible body. He is also first in preeminence and first in authority. Firstborn in this instance means first in quality as opposed to first in time. Others were raised from the dead prior to Jesus in time; Jesus Himself raised several prior to His death and resurrection.

This speaks of His rule and reign and leadership over the church and over all creation. He is the heir of all things and He is above all.

The Ruler of the Kings of the Earth

The kings and rulers of the nations of this earth may think they have autonomy and sovereignty, but all of them will not only one day bow before Jesus, they can do absolutely nothing apart from His allowance this very moment. We may question His control by the outward appearances we see, but He is in complete and absolute control as the absolute and sovereign **Ruler of the kings of the earth.**

Along with these three titles, John gives us three things that He has done and continues to do for His children.

v. 5b

“**To Him who loves us...**” This could be an entire series of sermons in itself if we were to express and describe all the aspects of Christ’s love for us, but simply take a moment to revel in the simplicity and purity of Jesus Christ the Lord loving you. And try not to measure this love by your experience of human love because it is so much higher and greater and deeper than anything you could imagine.

The love of Jesus Christ for you is unconditional and unimagable and immeasurable by human standards. Think of the person who loves you the best and the most and realize that that love woefully pales in comparison to the love Jesus has for you right here and right now.

He loves you, He loves you, He loves you, He loves you!

v. 5c

“**...and released us from our sins by His blood.**” The greatest expression of this magnificent love lies in the fact that He went to the cross of Calvary to die in your place so you could be released from your sins.

Your sins had to be paid for in one way or another. You can pay for them on your own by spending an eternity in hell, or you can let Jesus pay for them by the sacrifice of His blood that was shed on your behalf.

To be released from your sins is a vivid word picture. Before Christ came into your life, before you received Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you were in chains, in bondage to sin. You were under the authority and in slavery to Satan and his will over your life. You had no hope of escape, no hope of release, and no hope of freedom from the grip of sin and death and eternal torment.

But the blood of Jesus broke those chains! The blood of Jesus released you from the bondage you once were in! The blood of Jesus freed you from captivity! The blood of Jesus provided you with a new lease on life; a new life in Christ; a new eternity in heaven; and a new purpose and a new Lord!

He loves you and He has released you from the power of sin.

v. 6a

“...and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father...” Get this: Jesus has given us direct access to God the Father! We don't have to go through some mediator or some prophet or some priest to hopefully get a message through to God; we can have an audience with the God of the universe at any time of the day or night. You don't have to make an appointment or get in line or get on a waiting list, you can come into His presence at a moment's notice. You are the priest!

v. 6b

“...to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Oh, let's just praise Him this morning!

Let's pray.