

“May I Introduce Myself?” (Revelation 1:4-8)

Good morning, I'd like to introduce myself. My name is Keith Krell. I am your speaker today. Walk off the stage into the audience with a hand-held microphone and randomly ask people to introduce themselves. Then pose one of the following questions: (1) What is your mother's maiden name? (2) What time did you get up? (3) What did you have for breakfast this morning? (4) What is your address? (5) What are the last four digits of your social security number?

Now how well do you know any of the individuals I introduced you to? You don't know them very well, do you? I didn't ask helpful questions, did I? It was an exercise in futility, wasn't it? Today I'm going to attempt to do a better job at introducing you to God. This is no small challenge. Nonetheless, this is what we have been created for. As individuals, we have been called to “know Christ.” As a church, our mission is to “know Christ and to make Him known.” Therefore, this passage is an incredibly significant passage. Let's read Rev 1:4-8.

In these five verses, John gives us his greeting.¹ John identifies himself as the writer (1:4a).² His recipients were “**the seven churches³ in Asia**” (1:4a). The whole book is addressed to seven historical churches in Asia. However, in the New Testament, the term “Asia” never means the continent, as it does for us today. Rather, it is the western part of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Why does John choose “seven churches”? Why not six or eight? The answer is clear: In the Bible, numbers often have a significant meaning other than quantity. Seven frequently represents completeness, as there are seven days in a complete week.⁴ Examples abound: The Israelites marched around Jericho seven times. Naaman was instructed to dip in the river Jordan seven times. In Joseph's time there were seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. There were seven petitions in the Lord's Prayer. Jesus spoke seven times from the cross. Since seven represents completion, the churches that John addresses are all representative of churches that have existed in the past 2,000 years.

John's opening words are “**Grace and peace**” (1:4b). The word “**grace**” (*charis*) is a Greek greeting, while the word “**peace**” (*shalom*) is a Hebrew greeting. The authors of Scripture often used this form of salutation to include both their Gentile and Jewish readership. But the message here goes deeper than a mere greeting. First, we should note the order of God's blessings: grace, then peace. Peace is always the product of knowing and appropriating the grace of God in Christ. This order can never be changed. Ignore the grace of God and you forfeit the peace of God. Peace is always the product of grace. Though the message of Revelation is primarily one of judgment (chapters 6-18), this greeting of grace and peace is noteworthy. God here seeks to comfort and strengthen His people.

We will discover in 1:4-5, the words “grace” and “peace” come from the distinct ministries of the Trinity. This is the only place in the entire New Testament where this is the case.⁵ The Trinity refers to the Christian belief that there is one God, manifested in three persons. Now you may say, “I don't understand that.” Well, I don't either.

Several years ago, my oldest child, Joshua, and I were spending some time together. While I was sitting in my glider, Joshua went over to his toy bag and grabbed a tennis ball and brought it to me. He then went back to the bag and got a small nerf ball and returned to me with it. Lastly, he went and picked up a mini basketball. He then tried to take all three of them out of my lap and hold them, but no matter how hard he tried, he just couldn't hold all three. He wasn't capable of handling all three because he wasn't big enough. The Trinity is just like that—three-in-one is just more than our small, finite minds can grasp. The Trinity is above reason. It cannot be explained by logic; it is a teaching that we must grasp only by faith. And that's okay! Let's look into the Godhead.

The first member of the Trinity is God the Father, **“who is and who was and who is to come.”**⁶ This title occurs nowhere else in the Bible except in Revelation.⁷ It clearly points to the truth that God is eternal. **“The One who is”** points to the “I Am who I am” of the Old Testament (Exod 3:14). This is not a Popeye expression; it ascribes the unique fact and quality of God’s eternity.

This past week, I asked my two-year-old daughter, Jena, “What do you like most about Daddy?” Do you know what she said? She said, “Daddy?” I replied, “What you like most about Daddy is ‘Daddy?’” She nodded her little head and said again, “Daddy!” In her own adorable way, Jena was saying, “I like the fact that Daddy is Daddy!” In the same way, the most profound thought we can ever have about God is that He is.

Yet, not only does He tell us that He is but He also tells us that He was. **“The One who was”** refers to God’s continual existence in time past. It stresses that the Father has always been. That means before you were born, He was. Before creation, before time began, before Satan and the angels existed, God was. He has always existed; He is eternal.

Lastly, our Father is **“the One who is to come”** literally, “the One coming” or “the coming One.” This speaks of the future coming of God to take control of all things in a world that has been in rebellion to Him. He is coming to put down His enemies and to establish His reign through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:20-28). It also reminds us that after our lives are over, after the judgment, and after we have been in eternity for a million years, He is to come. God is eternal.

Before we move on, we must ask why John orders God’s description the way he does. The answer is: John wants us to know that we can trust God in the present because He’s been faithful in the past and will be so in the future. This is intended to be a great source of comfort to believers.⁸ I don’t know what your struggle is today. Maybe your marriage is on the brink of divorce. Or your kids are rebelling against your authority. Maybe you’re attempting to care for your aging parents but you’re going crazy in the process. Or you’re single and you’re having a difficult time waiting for God’s man or woman for you. Whatever your struggle, God is your comfort!

As we read further in 1:4, we discover that the Holy Spirit also provides “grace and peace.” He is identified by the phrase **“the seven Spirits who are before His throne.”** Although **“the seven spirits”** could refer to the angels before the throne,⁹ it seems best to understand this as a reference to the Holy Spirit and the perfection and fullness of His actions and the manifold nature of His ministry. Also, when we parallel this verse with Isaiah 11:2, we find a sevenfold ministry of the Holy Spirit:

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

The final member of the Trinity is the Lord Jesus Christ (1:5a-7b). In these verses, there is a three-fold emphasis on Christ's person and work, to draw attention to who He is, what He has done, and what He will do.¹⁰ First, He is called **"the faithful witness."**¹¹ The Greek word we translate "witness" (*martus*) is where we get our English word martyr. Apart from this passage and 3:14, Jesus is never referred to as a **"witness."** The meaning of this title can be seen in the use John makes of this word elsewhere in his book. The word "witness" then, as John uses it, denotes one who loses his life for the sake of Christ in evangelistic service. Christ can be called "the faithful witness" because He proclaimed His message and died in the course of that witness. The title "witness" that John gives to Jesus, then, represents His earthly work of giving His life for many. Are you willing to be a faithful witness? Are you willing to pay the ultimate price?

The second title that John gives to Jesus is **"the first-born of the dead."**¹² This title is often correctly associated with Christ's resurrection, yet it also includes the notion of Christ's lordship over all of creation. This sense of firstborn can be seen in Genesis 49:3, where Rueben, the firstborn, is "preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power." Also in Colossians 1:18, Christ, the firstborn from the dead, is also the Head of the body, the church. So Christ is over all. This is an encouraging word to John's original readers and to us. The resurrected Christ now is Lord over the church, and reigns now, at the right hand of the Father.

Finally, Jesus is called, **"the ruler of the kings of the earth."** This phrase is a characteristic phrase from the Old Testament and, in the book of Revelation, denotes the enemies of Christ and His people (6:15; 17:2, 18; 18:3; 19:19). Throughout the book, it is these "kings of the earth" who align themselves with the Beast and with the prostitute of Babylon to oppose God and His people. Thus, John here designates Christ as the One who has authority over all these powers and who has destroyed the power of the "rulers of this age" (1 Cor 2:8). The comforting element of this final phrase is that it can be literally rendered "the One who rules" or "the ruling One." Even now, Jesus Christ is ruling! The world that is in rebellion is still under His sovereign authority and power (Dan 2:20-21; 4:17; 5:18).

Not only is Jesus given three titles (as the Father was), His ministries are also praised. First, His present ministry: **"To Him who loves us."** This is the only verse where "love" is in the present tense in the Bible. He loves us right now. It was Jesus Christ's love for us that enabled Him to go to the cross and die for our sins.

Second, this love points us to His past ministry, **"who released us."** The word "released" looks at a past historic fact. It looks at an accomplished fact! Christ is classified as the Releaser, the One who has accomplished what is necessary to release men from the penalty and power of sin. The object of the releasing is "us," a reference to believers in Christ, but it is available to any who will put their trust in Christ (John 3:16). The verb "released" (*luo*) means "to untie, set free, release." It stresses that apart from Jesus Christ and His work on the cross, man is in bondage, chained to his sin problem: both its penalty (physical, spiritual, and eternal death) and its power (weakness and domination by a sinful nature). But this verse tells us that the **"blood of Christ"** dealt with our sin problem. What a wonderful reality: We have been once-for-all released from our sins. We do not have to be separated from God, we can believe the good news of Jesus Christ; that He died and rose for us so that we could live forever in God's presence. Have you done that? If not, why not do so today?

Verse 6 goes on to inform us that another aspect of Christ's past ministry is: **"He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father."** It is important to note that Jesus Christ has made us a kingdom (corporately) and priests (individually) (cf. 5:10; 20:6; Exod 19:6; Isa 61:6; 1 Pet 2:5, 9).

Note also, the word “kingdom” is singular and the word “priests” is plural. The reason for this is there is only one King, Jesus Christ, but there is a collective priesthood. A kingdom is a place of rule. So we are currently in a kingdom position, under King Jesus, to carry out our individual responsibilities for the purpose of advancing His kingdom on this earth. Repeat after me, I am a priest in the kingdom of God. Introduce yourself to the person next to you by saying, “Hello, I am priest so-and-so.” How does that feel? Does it feel congruent with how you see yourself?

Like the other authors of Scripture, John gets overwhelmed with the awesome practical realities of these theological truths. He immediately breaks into unabashed praise, “**To Him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.**” This sentence of Scripture is called a doxology (i.e., an ascription of praise or glory to God or the persons of the Trinity, usually found at the end of a literary section).¹³ The word “doxology” comes from the Greek word *doxa*, which means “glory.” This is the first of seven doxologies in Revelation (4:9, 11; 5:12, 13; 7:12; 19:1).¹⁴ This doxology also happens to be the shortest of all seven. Yet it is quite powerful! Let’s unpack the theology in this brief ascription.

This doxology is to the “Him” of 1:5-6: Jesus Christ. The word “**glory**” (*doxa*) refers to that which should accrue to Christ, the praise, the adoration, and worship, because of who He is and what He has done. “**Dominion**” (*kratos*) means “power, might, rule, and sovereignty.” These will be Christ’s forever and ever, amen (which means “so be it”!).

This excursion to adore Christ should point us to the priority of meditating on the Bible’s words. The ultimate purpose of the book of Revelation is for us to fall in deeper love with Jesus Christ. We should constantly be responding to Him with a heart of praise and adoration for who He is and all that He has done! The apostle John was called the “Beloved Disciple,” and if he could get excited about the truths that he was writing, how much more should we? John was the one who laid his head on Jesus’ chest. He was the only one of the twelve disciples who made it to Jesus’ crucifixion. He was Jesus’ closest, most intimate earthly friend...and yet, he still (like Paul) took theology to heart. The great theological truths of the Bible are not meant to cause us to become dry, dull, and intellectually staunch; these truths are intended to draw us closer to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, we move to another ministry of Jesus Christ (1:7). The word “**Behold**”¹⁵ means “pay attention” or “listen carefully.” The word is designed to arrest our attention and get us to focus on this as the great theme of Revelation. The words “**He is coming**” (*ercomai*) denotes an event which has not yet occurred, but is regarded as so certain that, in thought, it is viewed as already accomplished. Jesus’ coming is said to be “**with the clouds.**” This should remind us of Acts 1:9ff and the promise of the angels at the ascension of the Lord Jesus. There will be clouds of the glory of God manifesting the coming glory of the Lord to rule and take up the reigns of the government over the earth in a visible way (Matt 24:30). Our text says that “**every eye**” will see Jesus. When He ascended, only the disciples watched Him leave, but when He returns, all mankind will see Him in all His glory! Even those who “**pierced Him.**” This refers primarily to the Jews who asked for Jesus’ death (Zech 12:10), but it could also refer to the Romans who carried out the sentence. Ultimately, we all caused His death because of our sin. Regardless, “all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him,” literally, they shall “wail over Him.” The word “**mourn**” means “to beat the breast in wailing and mourning”! For some it will be a mourning of repentance. For others it will be the mourning over the judgments that He will pour out on sinners.

1:7c-8: The benediction to the greeting begins with the words of 1:7, “**even so, amen.**” There is a combination of two languages here. A Greek and Hebrew word is put together. “**Even so**” (*nai*) is the Greek affirmation “yes.” “**Amen**” is the Hebrew. The double affirmation puts upon this prophecy the

seal of certainty.¹⁶ It confirms the sure return of the Lord and the statements made about Him. “Amen” means “to be firm, sure, true.” It is a further affirmation of the promise of the verse. Although we cannot be certain, it seems best to understand 1:8 as God the Father speaking.¹⁷ God the Father is called the “Alpha and the Omega” in 1:8 and 21:6 but the name is also applied to Jesus in 1:17 and 22:13. This is a strong argument for the deity of Christ. Likewise, the title, “the first and the last” goes back to Isaiah and is another proof that Jesus is God.

The “Alpha and the Omega” are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. It is the equivalent to our A and Z. “The Almighty” is the Greek *pantokrator* from *pas* “all” and *kratos* “might, power.” It stresses God’s omnipotence and sovereign authority over all the universe! “Almighty” is a key name for God in Revelation (Rev 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22). The backdrop to understanding this title is the book of Isaiah. In Isaiah 44:6, God Almighty affirms: “I am the first and I am the last; apart from Me there is no God.” Again in Isaiah 48:12, God said: “I am He; I am the first and I am the last,” and God said this right after His pronouncement that, “I will not yield My glory to another” (verse 11b). Christ’s use of this title in Revelation 22:12-13 was thus, undoubtedly, intended to be taken as a claim to be God Almighty. No other conclusion is acceptable.

Notice, especially in Revelation 1:11, that He announces that He is the Alpha and the Omega. This title comes when used of God (or Christ), the first and last letters express eternity and omnipotence. Christ’s claim to be the Alpha and the Omega—like God Almighty’s claim in the Old Testament—is an affirmation that He is the all-powerful One of eternity past and eternity future.

I’ve introduced several people to you. But now I want to know who will volunteer to introduce GOD? This is a pop quiz but you can keep your Bible open. Which ascription is meaningful to you? Speak it forth. Now that the Lord has introduced Himself, will you give Him a rousing round of applause?

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Notes

¹ Although the predominant genre of literature is apocalyptic, this salutation bears the definite form of an epistle (see especially Galatians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, and 1 & 2 Thessalonians).

² As my overview indicated, I believe that the apostle John is indeed the author of this book. Every New Testament book was written by an apostle or by one who was closely associated with an apostle. This was one of the marks of inspiration that was necessary for recognition of a book into the canon of Scripture.

³ Galatians, James and 1 & 2 Peter are also written to multiple churches.

⁴ The number seven is used 55 times in the book of Revelation.

⁵ Elsewhere, the greeting is from God the Father and Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit excluded.

⁶ It is interesting to note that this designation of God corresponds to the division of the book given in 1:19. This should comfort and encourage us. The sovereign God of the Bible is the One who is behind all that will happen in the future.

⁷ Rev 4:8; cf. Rev 11:17; 16:5; Exod 3:14-15.

⁸ For additional support of this view see Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation: BECNT* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 61.

⁹ This view argues that the Holy Spirit's present ministry in this book is to indwell His people, speak through His prophets, and not to manifest Himself in heaven. In Rev 3:1 it seems clear that the seven spirits are indeed seven stars that we know as a symbol for angels.

¹⁰ The faithful witness (in his death and life); firstborn of the dead (Resurrection) and ruler of the kings (future). Another form of who was, is, and is to come.

¹¹ The Greek text is emphatic. Literally, it reads, "the witness, the faithful One." This stresses the character of His witness as faithful.

¹² Cf. Ps 89:27; Acts 2:29-32; 4:2; 26:23; Rom 1:4; 1 Cor 15:23.

¹³ F.B. Huey, Jr. & Bruce Corley, *A Student's Dictionary for Biblical & Theological Studies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 66.

¹⁴ Steve Gregg, ed. *Revelation: Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville: Nelson, 1997), 56.

¹⁵ The Greek word *idou* ("behold") is used 26 times in Revelation. Five of these usages are used in conjunction with the verb *erchomai* ("I come"). Three of these five usages are in reference to the return of Christ (16:15; 22:7, 12).

¹⁶ Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 25.

¹⁷ The following reasons support this: first, the title "Lord God" is used of God the Father throughout the OT. Second, the Oone "who is and who was and who is to come" is used of God the Father in Rev 1:4. Third, in the Greek

OT (LXX), the term "Almighty" renders the Hebrew expression "Lord of Host" (e.g., 2 Sam 5:10; Jer 5:14; Amos 3:13). Interestingly, this term is used nine times in Rev and always in reference to God the Father (see 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22). Fourthly, the phrase "Alpha and the Omega" is applied to God the Father in both 1:8 and 21:6. Finally, John is stressing the unity that exists between the Father and Son. He does this by referring to the Father as the "Alpha and Omega" (1:8) and Jesus as "the first and the last" (1:17) and once again the Father as the "Alpha and Omega" (21:6) and the Son as the "Alpha and Omega" (22:13). This is intentional parallelism.