

THE GRACE OF WRATH

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Text

Chapter 1:4-8

Topic

The apostle John looks into the future and sees the Second Coming of Jesus "with clouds"

Title

***"Hey (hey), You (you),
Gaze Up at My Clouds"***

When there was a Disneyland in Anaheim, the Fantasyland Teacups were a blast to ride. An original opening day attraction, they provided one-and-one-half minutes of intense, non-stop, nausea-inducing whirling.

My secret for not getting dizzy: Stare directly into the eyes of the person across from you the entire time. Let your gaze stray even a little, and the whirling background will overwhelm you.

In a world that seems to be spinning out of control, you need to focus your gaze on a Person who won't look away.

**Don't take your eyes off of Jesus;
not in life; not in this book**

Along those lines, I want you to 'see' something in these verses that I think is pretty endearing:

- In verse four, Jesus mentioned the **churches**. While in context He was talking about seven particular first century gatherings, we'll see that Jesus' letters to them are for *all* churches throughout the Church Age - **us included**.
- In verse five, we're told He "loved **us** and washed **us** from **our** sins in His own blood."
- In verse six we learn Jesus "has made **us** kings and priests to His God and Father."

Jesus doesn't take His eyes off of us

It would be enough to thrill us to know that the Lord is ever watching us. I'm saying He has locked eyes on us. Two people locking eyes in a crowded room is a staple of romantic cinema. *O, how He loves you and me!*

I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 Jesus Is Preparing You For His Return With Clouds, and #2 Jesus Will Place You At His Return With Clouds.

#1 Jesus Is Preparing You For His Return With Clouds (v4-6)

Let me summarize how these verses include us: Between His first and second comings to earth, Jesus is gathering His church, comprised of those who have been washed of their sins. Once saved, He works in you to prepare you for ministry as kings and priests in the future Kingdom of God on earth when He comes with clouds.

Rev 1:4 John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,

"Seven" is a prominent number in the Revelation. Or I should say, *groups of sevens* are prominent. A group or series of sevens is called a *heptad*. In all there are at least fifty-two heptads in the book. Here are just some of them:

- Seven Churches
- Seven Spirits

- Seven Lampstands
- Seven Stars (and that's just in chapter one)
- Seven Seals
- Seven Trumpets
- Seven Bowls
- Seven Lamps
- Seven Promises to the Overcomer
- Seven Horns
- Seven Eyes
- Seven Angels
- Seven Thunders
- Seven Heads
- Seven Crowns
- Seven Plagues
- Seven Mountains, and
- Seven Kings

* There are seven blessings, or beatitudes (1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, & 22:14).

* Jesus makes seven I AM statements (1:8, 1:11, 1:17, 1:18; 21:6; 22:13, & 22:16).

Here is a quote from an article on the Hebrew use of seven:

The number seven is especially prominent in Scripture, appearing over 700 times. From the seven days of Creation to the many "sevens" in Revelation, the number seven connotes such concepts as completion and perfection, exoneration and healing, and the fulfillment of promises and oaths.

"To the seven churches which are in Asia." These seven churches were all in the region we know as Western Turkey. If you look at a map, you'll see that they are in geographical order with regard to a messenger delivering the Revelation to each of them one-by-one.

The seven letters to the seven churches have at least three applications:

1. They originally had a *provincial* application: These seven were actual churches existing in John's day to which Jesus wrote for *correction* and/or *commendation*.
2. The letters always have a *present* application: At the end of each letter is the exhortation to hear what the Spirit says to the churches, plural. Each letter is written to a church, and each is written to *all* the churches for the entire Church Age.
3. The letters always have *personal* application to every Christian in every age. They each say, "he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Do you have an "ear?" You do; and that means what Jesus said to the churches He said to you

It's also popular to suggest that the letters have a *prophetic* application. By that is meant the letters represent seven successive periods of church history, from the apostolic church up to the end of the Church Age. As appealing as that sounds, *there is one big problem with the prophetic application*.

If the church had to go through these seven periods, the rapture could not have been imminent until the last era

"Grace to you and peace" was so common a greeting we may not think about how remarkable it is to be able to say it; or how much practical help is contained in it.

1. "Grace to you" should take me back to the understanding that I am totally undeserving of salvation. I am a sinner by nature and by choice. God has saved me by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
2. "Peace" is what I can therefore experience as a human being. I am at peace *with* God and I can have the supernatural peace *of* God.

Remember that lyric, "What the world needs now, is love, sweet love?"

What the world needs now is grace, saving grace, and the peace that accompanies it

I can think of no truth more mind-changing in a time of extreme turmoil and stress than to know I am at peace with God, and that I can therefore be at peace in my spirit in the whirling world.

"Him who is and who was and who is to come" sounds like it is describing Jesus, but a Jew would immediately and correctly understand this to refer to YHWH. Plus you're told in the next phrase that this Person is seated on His throne. The Father sits on His throne and Jesus sits at His right hand.

Next we are greeted by "the seven spirits who are before His throne." If you're going to keep track of weird descriptions in the Revelation, this is a worthy inclusion.

A popular solution is that this refers to a verse in Isaiah that seems to describe God the Holy Spirit seven ways. It reads, "The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD" (11:2).

Language scholars point out, however, that while in English we may be able to count *seven* descriptors, in Hebrew there are really only *six*.

John will say something similar in the fifth chapter of the Revelation. There we read, "And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and **seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth**" (v6).

If we were Jews, familiar with the Old Testament, and we heard "seven eyes" you wouldn't think of Isaiah.

You would think of chapter four

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in the Book of Zechariah

Zechariah spoke of "the eyes of the LORD" being "seven" (4:10). He spoke this way while discussing the ministry of God the Holy Spirit.

Because Zechariah used this imagery to describe the ministry of God the Holy Spirit, we know that John was using it that way also.

Why use these phrases instead of simply saying God the Holy Spirit?

One commentator pointed out, "The book of Revelation is immediately using images from Old Testament prophecies to show that this book is interacting with those symbols. Revelation uses language that is found in previous prophecies so that the readers can connect the message of Revelation to the prophecy in the Old Testament."

These references are signs that direct us to Zechariah. An angel was showing him things. I'll read it:

Zec 4:2 And he said to me, "What do you see?" So I said, "I am looking, and there *is* a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the *stand* seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps.

Zec 4:3 Two olive trees *are* by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left."

- We will encounter seven lampstands later in the first chapter of the Revelation (v13 & 20).
- The angel revealed the "two olive trees" as, "The two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth" (v14). Later in the Revelation, two anointed witnesses have a prominent role in the Great Tribulation.

One more thing about not naming God the Holy Spirit directly. He has the ministry of showing the world Jesus. He is the Promise of the Father, given by the Son. He keeps a low profile. Descriptions of His ministry compliment His determination not to call attention to Himself.

Charles Spurgeon said, "It is the chief office of the Holy Spirit to glorify Christ. He does many things, but this is what He aims at in all of them, to glorify Christ."

Rev 1:5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,

These same three phrases are found in Psalm 89 as a description of the Messiah Who would rule on David's throne from Jerusalem. By using the references in the Revelation, it is beyond doubt that Jesus is the son of David Who will rule on the throne from Jerusalem over the much promised Kingdom.

These phrases also present, to His church, Jesus in His past, present, and future ministries:

1. "Faithful witness" looks to Jesus' past. "Witness" is *martyr*. Jesus came and was faithful to accomplish His witness on the Cross for the human race.
2. "Firstborn" is a word of preeminence. It means Jesus rose from the dead as the first and preeminent Person to never die again. It means others will follow and rise as a result of His resurrection. We live presently in the power of His resurrection as we await our resurrection or the rapture.
3. In the future the Lord Jesus will be installed as the "ruler over the kings of the earth."

"To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood..."

Jesus "loved us," **and** thereby we know that He loves us:

- He loved you while you were yet a sinner and He proved His love on the Cross by dying for you.
- That is why I can say, *Jesus loves you*. His love does not depend upon your behavior and it can never change.

He “washed us from our sins in His own blood.” “Washed” can be translated *loosed* or *released* and is better understood that way:

- We are released once-for-all from the penalty of sin.
- We are loosed from the power of sin.

Yes, of course, we still sin; but there is a very strong sense in which we don't have to.

Revelation 1:6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

This is in a prophetic tense. It is understood to be presently true because it will surely come to pass. In His Second Coming, we return with Jesus and in some sense share in His rule over the earth.

To Him will be “glory” when He is fully revealed at His Second Coming. Then He will have “dominion forever and ever” from that time forward.

How do we understand that Jesus does not have “dominion” now? Theologian Roger Olsen describes the church age like this:

We are living in “enemy occupied territory.” For whatever reason and by whatever means the kingdoms of this world, the political systems that people have created, are not yet ruled over by God except in the sense that they are subject to God's ultimate control. God can limit their destructive power, but He has relinquished, as it were, complete control and is waiting and depending (until the end of this age) on us - God's people - to resist God's enemy who is occupying His territory (“the kingdoms of this world”).

If you think that gives the devil too much authority, consider the following:

- The apostle John, in his Gospel, calls the devil “the ruler of this world” three times (12:31, 14:30, & 16:11).

- The apostle Paul calls the devil “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2).
- When the devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he “took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me” (Mathew 4:8-9). Jesus did not dispute the devil’s right to offer Him those kingdoms.

It is therefore with joy unspeakable we read that Jesus is “coming with clouds” (v7) to be “the ruler over the kings of the earth” (v5)

The devil’s temporary authority will topple and the rightful ruler will be installed.

I frequently use as an illustration the D-Day invasion of Normandy in World War 2. It effectively ended the war in Europe. But fierce fighting continued for eleven more months before victory was declared. From D-Day June 6th until August 21st, when Paris was liberated, 72,911 Allied service members were killed or listed missing and 153,475 were wounded.

Jesus defeated Satan on the Cross, but the kingdoms of this world are still under Satan’s dominion until the Second Coming

Let your heart delight in the knowledge that Jesus is keeping His eyes locked on you:

- He saw you from the Cross, we might say, when He washed you from your sins in His own blood.
- He called you out into His Church.
- You are His kingdom of priests, being prepared for your future ministry in the Kingdom, at His Second Coming.

#2 Jesus Will Place You
At His Return With Clouds (v7-8)

Michael W. Smith sang,

*Need your light to help me find
My place in this world
My place in this world*

Once you receive the Lord, you *do* find your place in this world. You do it the old fashioned way: Pray, read your Bible, gather together with believers serving in a local church, and share your love for the Lord with others.

- You are a member of the body of Jesus on the earth. Serve Him, stay humble, be led by the Holy Spirit, and you will discover what member you are in that body.
- You are a living stone in the Temple of God on the earth. Allow the Lord to place you where He wants, when He wants.

In the future, you'll be coming back with Jesus to rule alongside Him.

Rev 1:7 Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.

This verse is absolutely full of the Old Testament. It borrows "cloud" imagery from Daniel 7:13 & 14, Jeremiah 4:13, Ezekiel 30:3, Zephaniah 1:15, and Zechariah 12:10-13:1. Those passages all mention His "coming in the clouds."

Is "clouds" symbolic? Probably not - not here, anyway. It means that clouds of some sort will accompany Jesus at His Second Coming.

You might remember at His ascension into Heaven in the Book of Acts we read, "Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, **and a cloud received Him out of their sight.** And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into

heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, **will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven**" (1:9-11).

- "They who pierced Him" refers to the nation of Israel in their official rejection of Jesus in His first coming. In Zechariah 12:10 it says that at the Second Coming, "And I will pour on **the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem** the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me **whom they pierced**. Yes, they will mourn for Him."
- "Every eye will see Him" means everyone on the earth who is not a Jew.

"And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him." This "mourning" speaks of repentance.

At His Second Coming, all Israel on the earth will be saved.

"Even so, Amen." This is the second "Amen" in this passage. (There are no "Awoman's," BTW).

Rev 1:8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

"Alpha" and "Omega" are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. It's like our expression, *Everything from A to Z*. As if that wasn't inclusive enough, Jesus said He was the Beginning and the End.

With the Revelation of Jesus Christ completing the Bible, you and I have God's entire alphabet, and every word He wants to say to us.

Jesus described Himself in terms equal to God the Father when He said "who is and who was and who is to come."

"Almighty" is used ten times in the New Testament and nine of those uses are in the Revelation.

It means something like *the one who had his hand on everything*. It's a word of oversight.

Although Satan is still wreaking havoc, God limits the authority of the ruler of this world, and God works through providence to push His plan forward to its ultimate and inevitable end.

Once again we note that Jesus spoke of us prominently. We will serve with Him, next to Him, as kings and priests: or as some translate it, as a kingdom of priests.

Our world can seem to be spinning out of control. That includes the world at large *and* our own personal “worlds.”

Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. The things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

I want to share a quote from Charles Spurgeon. It isn't about our study so much as it is about every Bible study. He said,

I have talked with you as well as I could upon this sublime theme, and if I did not know that the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ, I should go home miserable, for I have not been able to glorify my Lord as I would; but I know that the Holy Spirit can take what I have said out of my very heart, and can put it into your hearts, and he can add to it whatever I have omitted.

- Go ye who love the Lord, and glorify Him. Try to do it by your lips and by your lives.
- Go ye, and preach Him, preach more of Him, and preach Him up higher and higher, and higher.