

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[a] 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,”[b]

and “every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him”;

and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.”[c]

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.”

John’s Vision of Christ

9 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. **10** On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, **11** which said: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.”

12 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, **13** and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man,[d] dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. **14** The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. **15** His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. **16** In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. **18** I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

You Can’t Miss It

Getting directions from the boss was always a painful experience. It wouldn’t have been so bad if he had used street names or given me a map and told me where I was going. Instead he would start out

with his hand (because everybody carries a map of Wisconsin around with them on their hand). “Here’s what you do. You head out and take a left onto the main road out there, stay on it for about 5-10 miles and then once you see the red fence post next to the horse take another left. Continue straight for about a half hour then turn right under the bridge, take a left at the stop light. The jobsite will be on your right, plain as day. You can’t miss it.” Of course I was faithfully scribbling notes down on the nearest piece of wood that could be found but somehow, “You can’t miss it,” often translated into “you will miss it,” or “You definitely don’t have a chance of finding it why did you even bother trying to take notes?”

While that may have been frustrating upon hearing such directions John tells us exactly where we are going and exactly what will happen. “You can’t miss it,” even if you are trying to get lost before lunch. You can’t miss it because every eye will see. For us it will be a day of unending joy. We will rejoice. But for those who pierced him, rejected, mocked him, and wanted to go off in their own direction, it will be a day of mourning.

For John and the church it must have felt like they missed it. John was on Patmos, just off the coast of Turkey. Surely he can’t possibly be in the right place. The last of the apostles is now stuck on an island. Before you think this is a small island with one coconut tree where John has all kinds of time to relax and think. Patmos is 34 miles in circumference. It was a sizeable place with history before the Romans used it as an exile for their convicts. John was there. He didn’t want to be there. He was banished. They were trying to get rid of him. If that means he was working in the mines or in some sort of prison colony we don’t know, but generally being exile isn’t a good thing.

He may have felt lost. He may have wondered why me? Why here? Why now? But God had not given up on him. He came to John and gave John a glimpse into God’s plan and purpose for the church, the direction it would follow from that moment until Judgment Day. He was told, “*Write...what you see.*” This message wasn’t just for John’s morale it was for the churches back on the mainland. Jesus assured John, a man imprisoned for the gospel, a man expecting martyrdom, a man expecting the Roman government to try to stamp out the Christian Church once and for all, he has won. God is with them and if that is the case what can a puny, here for a few years and then dead and gone, pathetic little Caesar do?

He points John back in the right direction. John writes to the churches in Asia and reminds them that even though it may not look so good, you are at peace with God and that is what matters. “*Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits (or Sevenfold Spirit) before his throne, and from Jesus Christ.*” Grace and peace are coming to you from God the Father, the Spirit, and Jesus Christ who is, “*the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.*” This is the God you are at peace with. This is the God

who is on your side. As a faithful witness: everything he says about himself is the truth. As the firstborn from the dead: he is the first one to be raised and he holds the power over death. He is the ruler of the kings of the earth: even when he was mocked, beaten, and crucified by the Roman government, it was part of his plan and purpose. Jesus was always in control even when he stood powerless and pathetic before Pilate telling him, *“I am a king. In fact for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.”* All of this fit into God’s plan even though it did not look like it. You can’t miss it.

That same God, who was with John and the persecuted church, is with us. We have no reason to worry about government officials, madmen, tyrants, or those who want to remove Christianity from our nation. We may not be in exile on a small island in the Pacific. We may not be gathered together and burned on account of Jesus. But where are we going? As we spend the end of our lives living with bodies that are wearing out, does it feel like we are lost or have you ever asked, “Are we there yet?” Are we headed in the right direction or are we even moving? The temptation of our time is not from the persecution but the doubt. Is God in control? Is he in power? “It’s been 2000 years since Jesus walked this earth, he said he would come again and take us to be with him, so where is he?”

I would say that’s plenty of time to become impatient. We hear so much about the end of the world in church, especially during the season of End times and Advent. We hear so much about the end of the world right in this season, and yet nothing happens. Did we make a wrong turn? We read in Scripture how God punishes sin, and yet we watch as so much sin seems to go unpunished, and as people around us even praise sin. Where is God in all this? It may feel like we’re lost. It may feel like he isn’t coming. But what really hurts is when we realize who it is we’ve doubted. We’ve doubted the directions given to us by our faithful witness. When we do so we doubt God, the one who loves us and doesn’t want us to be lost.

The words of comfort John speaks to the churches suffering in Asia still apply. The same powerful unchanging God that was there for John and the early Christian Church is still the one in control of the events in our lives too even if we can’t see direction in our life. What is even more amazing is what our God does. He takes us, those who are lost by nature, turns us around and points us in the right direction. He points us home. John not only tells us who he is but he also tells us what he has done for us, why he deserves glory and honor, *“To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 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.”* Our conquering king will come and this is the one who loves us. He set us free from our sin and our doubts with his blood. He takes our sin and guilt and sets us free from dungeon that we’ve been locked away in. He cares for because we are part of his kingdom. You can’t miss it.

Transition: He is a faithful witness and he will come again but when he comes again not everyone will be rejoicing. Many will mourn because even they won't miss it. He will come and many will mourn.

John didn't want the church to be afraid. He wanted them to know what sort of conquering king they had on their side, that even though he (John) was imprisoned and exiled, the one true God holds the keys of death and hades. He is in control and using even this for the good of his church. He wanted them to know that God is in control and try as the devil may there is nothing he can do to defeat God's kingdom. Even on the island of Patmos John was able to spread God's Word. He wrote this letter and it circulated to numerous churches. It spread about as an encouragement to all believers.

After speaking about Jesus, his work, his position, he takes us on a detour and shows us the outcome. The theme of the book which is repeated 7 times in each of his visions, "*Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.*" Jesus will return with the clouds, rolling in on the clouds just as Daniel spoke about in his vision. The Psalmist writes, "*He makes the clouds his chariot*" (Psalm 104:3). Jesus will return in style, he will return with authority, his kingdom extending beyond all borders, and it will never be destroyed.

Those who pierced him are singled out. How will they react when they look up and see his face? They will mourn. They will beat their chest in failure. Pilate, Nero, Domitian, all the rest, their days are but 70 or 80 years if they have the strength. Their kingdoms failed. Their kingdoms are destroyed. They all died. But God's kingdom never ends. Jesus says, "*I am the Alpha and the Omega,*" says the Lord God, "*who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.*" You can't miss it.

We too don't need to be afraid that we aren't on the right track. We are reassured of our conquering king who is at our side. We wait for his return. While it will be a day of rejoicing it will also be a day of mourning. There is no 2nd chance. There is a sense of urgency in these words, a sense of urgency that only builds as time passes. I don't know when he will arrive but I do know what kind of day it will be and what he is driving. He will come with the clouds. He will come as a conquering king who will judge.

This is our conquering king who not only loves us and has set us free by his blood but he also makes us part of his kingdom. He has made us priests, breathing out his Holy Spirit and giving us the keys, the authority to forgive sin or bind sin. As his priests we can come before him in prayer whenever we want. We can ask for directions whenever we feel lost. And he gives us his Word, his baptism, his sacrament to remind us he is still in control.

There was no time for John and the early Christian church to hide and pretend that it will all go away. There was no time for them to ignore directions and pretend to be lost for some time. John said 3 times in these four verses, Jesus is coming. Jesus is on his way. What does that mean for us? It means we're almost there. It means we have work to do as we point others in the right direction. So that there will be even more rejoicing.

Often upon hearing direction from the boss we wouldn't immediately head out the door. More often than not we would also stop by the office manager and get another detailed description/map of the area with drawn in fence posts and moveable horses, as well as a phone number to call (in case we missed it), and an address. Directions are nice. They let us know where we are going. God's directions are specific. Turn to the cross, see your sins paid in full, and then point others to it along the way. God points us home and he reminds us, "You can't miss it."