

Grace and Peace to You

Revelation 1:3-8

1. Introduction

Children, young people, adults, singles, and families, we are gathered this morning around the Communion Table to remember Him whom the Father made sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Cor 5:21. Revelation 1:3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near. 'This blessing,' the Spirit says, 'is for all who read, listen and take to heart what is written.' Therefore, the blessing is for us this morning, not just for churches who received the original letter. Rev. 1:4-8

1. Grace and Peace: Who is speaking and why v.4

The first words we hear are "Grace and peace to you." It was and is an ancient, simple, gracious, bi-cultural greeting [Hellenistic (grace) and Hebrew (Shalom)], and it came to mean something like "Hello. All of the best to you," as one paraphrase puts it (Message). So, *Bon Matin, Buenos Dias, Guten Tag*, and good day, just to make sure I don't offend you. This seems so trivial and inconsequential, but it isn't because the person who says, "Grace and Peace to you" and why they say it makes a world of difference.

If I had a chance tomorrow to see Ukrainian President Mr. Vladimir Zelensky (to use his pronounceable Romanized name) and I shook his hand and said, "Grace and peace to you," no one would notice or think anything of it. However, if Mr. Biden met him in Kiev and said, "Grace and peace to you," a lot of reporters would scratch their heads and think it might be significant. But let's consider the impact if another Vladimir – a Mr. Vladimir Putin – and Mr. Zelensky agreed to go down to the Donbas for a cup of coffee together and in the process say to each other, "Grace and Peace to you," the entire world would be ecstatic. We would be told food shortages would disappear, oil prices would go down, inflation would disappear, stock markets would soar, and global temperatures would literally decrease, it hardly gets better than that. Therefore, we need to reflect carefully on **Who** said, "Grace and Peace to you" and **why** they said it.

1.1. The Eternal Father

v. 4 "Grace and peace to you from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before His thrown, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth."

The writer of Revelation seems to have had a hard time expressing in human/Greek language the who-it-was who spoke and is speaking these words to us. Humans are so locked into time and space we are unable to think outside this constraining paradigm. The Person speaking "Grace and Peace" to us this morning is indescribable and the best we can do is to come up with a kind of stand in: He is the One who is, was, and is to come. The Eternal Father. Let's illustrate how this outside-of-time reality impacts our understanding of the "Who" it is that is saying Grace and Peace.

God's people don't get their palms read by a person who promises to tell them about their future for at least two reasons: one is that fortunetelling makes a statement to the unseen spiritual world that we are open to a little "fun" that may involve their input, and such spirit involvement will always be grounded on lies. The second is that you may as well take a match to the money you offer. One can imagine the palm reader stating this line or that line in our palm indicates X number of years left and Y number of good or bad things happening. But suppose you said, "Okay, now tell me what I did yesterday at this time of the day" you would discover they would not have any idea of what you did. If they can't go back in time a day, they certainly won't be able to go forward in time a day either.

The Person who speaks Grace and Peace to us this morning is unconstrained by limited knowledge and unbounded by limited power; when He speaks Grace it has no measure and when He speaks Peace it means peace has no circumstance it doesn't circumscribe. He is, was, and will be – always eternal,

without beginning and without ending, the Creator of time itself and the one who says elsewhere, time as humans know it – you are out of here. Done. (e.g., Is 60:20). Such a Person really can say Grace and Peace and it means Grace and Peace in the fullest, most wonderful way.

2.2 The Spirit who is before the Throne

The second person to speak Grace and Peace to us is the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the sent One who

- makes us holy like our Lord Jesus Christ
- comforts us
- guides us
- brings spiritual life to us
- empowers and invigorates us for service

He is the One who says to us this morning, Grace and Peace and when this Person speaks these words, and when He speaks them to us, we know that He will deliver all they mean to us. Empty, polite, bi-culturally sensitive words become transformational far beyond anything we can hope for or imagine.

2.3 God the Son – Jesus Christ

The Third Person speaking Grace and Peace to us this morning is our Lord Jesus Christ,

- the faithful witness to all that is True
- the first to rise from the dead
- the ruler over all the kings and queens, presidents and prime ministers, and all seen and unseen powers and authorities

When our Lord speaks Grace and Peace to us it isn't about capacity (the Father) or efficacious delivery (the Spirit) but about cost – the One saying Grace and Peace has given us everything at ultimate cost. When we realize what He has done for us we know we can trust it because He invested His life to make it true and meaningful. See below under "Why" the words are spoken to us.

2. What do the words mean

Who speaks Grace and Peace to us? The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But what did they mean? Was it really, "Hope you are having a nice day." To understand the words' significance, it is helpful to remember that the book of Revelation which follows is full of judgment. We are to view all the upset and uproar that is coming through the opening statement. Earthquakes, famine, pestilence, woes, and persecution, falling empires, tanking economies, vanishing armies, terrifying thunderstorms, strange celestial phenomenon and anarchy – and God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit say: "Grace and Peace to you." It's stunning.

3.1 Grace vv 4,5

- When we unintentionally hurt or annoy someone and we apologize, it is a relief to hear them say, "It's okay, I forgive you."
- There are times when we are angry with someone, when we say unkind or even untrue things, or things we know will hurt the other person – and when we say "Sorry," and mean it, there is great relief to hear them say, "I forgive you."
- Someone has said, "It takes a long time to gain a person's deep trust, it takes a moment to lose it, and a lifetime to win it back." When we hurt someone deeply, even cruelly, and they choose to forgive and begin the long process of restoration, there are no words to describe the emotion that follows.

But grace goes beyond forgiveness, amazing though that is. Forgiveness is included but there is also an outpouring of God's blessing, favor, and approval for no reason related to us. It is the gift of God at the cost of Jesus' life. Therefore, every day and virtually every hour we like to sing about Him and what He has done for us. Sing "Grace Greater Than our Sin" # 78

Many young people leave the church because they have experienced the church as an institution proposing and imposing culturally contrarian rules and regulations. Dear young people, if this is the impression you have, it is not an impression grounded on the reality of the gospel. The message we received from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is Grace and Peace. Here in the church is where you should see and experience this message first-hand.

Our physical universe is a life sustaining universe based on carbon-oxygen-hydrogen and on forces like gravity. The way in which these elements fit together to sustain life is so incredible it is hard to calculate mathematically the odds of it just happening. If we want to thrive in this universe we need to work within the framework of these elements. We cannot say to ourselves, "I am giving up on hydrogen and oxygen, I no longer want to be a carbon-based life form, etc." That would be like saying, "I'll help myself to a plate full of rocks for supper." The universe created for us also has a spiritual dimension and there are guidelines and elements that simply must be observed for life to be full, rich, and meaningful. If we live within this framework the gospel is a Gospel of abundant grace. Love and forgiveness and God's blessing overwhelm us and fill us with joy and thanksgiving. God's 'rules and regulations' are like gravity, carbon, and oxygen to the physical world – they are lifegiving not burdensome. The point I was hoping to make is that disappointment with the church as a purveyor of rules and regulations is deeply distressing because the Gospel is a message of abundant grace (and peace).

3.2 Peace vv 4,5

And after He has spoken Grace to us, He speaks Peace. Grace comes first and all is made right with the Father. Until we understand God's forgiveness – His outpouring of unmerited blessing – there can be no peace in this world. In Sunday School this year I reminded the K-5 group that the most frequently stated command in Scripture is, "Do not Fear." Even children understand the need for peace.

Adult fears are rarely associated with bad dreams and lost Teddy Bears, but they are, if anything, more ubiquitous: fear of failure, fear of people, fear of insufficient resources, fear of climate change, fear of government overreach, fear of the big earthquake, fear of recession and job loss, fear our children will reject the truth, fear of geopolitical events – a nuclear war, China invading Taiwan - fears and 1 Cor. 2:1-3 weakness. Our Lord knew one of our greatest needs was simply peace. "Don't let your heart be troubled;" "Don't be anxious about anything..." "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds." "Do not worry about your life..." When the Person who calms literal and figurative storms says, "Peace" and we actually listen to Him, our anxieties are reframed realistically and the Martha in us becomes the Mary we all potentially can and should be.

4 We respond with praise and adoration declaring His Eternal Glory and Power vv 5b, 6

4.1 Praise and adoration because of His Love

Sing "The Love of God" #91

4.2 Praise and adoration because of His deliverance

4.3 Praise and adoration because of His healing, His transformation

There are many images of what we were like before the Spirit brought new life and the work of transformation began. Once I was a slave, once I was lost, once I was in a slimy pit of mud and mire and He set my feet on a rock, He gave me a firm place to stand (Ps 40), and here in this passage He brought me into His kingdom and gave me the right of a priest to enter boldly and immediately at any time into the Holiest of Places to give Him directly my **sacrifice of praise and service.**

5 Why? Because He shed His life blood for us v5

There was no Grace and Peace from God – just a cultural "Have a good day." Apart from the substitutionary death of our Lord Jesus Christ there was no Grace and Peace but when He died and rose again, everything changed. Now the Godhead speaks Grace and Peace: Is 53

v.4 Surely, He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows....

v.5 He was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities.

v.6 The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

6 Summary statement

The Spirit stands at the door of our heart this morning and knocks Rev 3:20. If we open our hearts He will come in and fellowship with us. Here in the opening words of the revelation of our Lord, the fellowship begins with the words of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: "Grace and Peace to you."

As we come to the table to eat and drink in remembrance of Him, He says, Grace and Peace to you my child, grace and peace to you dear teenager, grace and peace to you single and alone adult, parent, and grandparent – to each and all of us: Grace and Peace from God our Father, from Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, and from the Holy Spirit our Comforter and Guide.