

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 before his throne, 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, 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. 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. “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

In the name of Jesus Christ, your King, dear citizens of his Kingdom,

Sara didn't like the king. She never asked for a king and she didn't want a king. She was a maiden in his kingdom, not by choice, but by birth. Her mother and father had a tiny house and a plot of land to work. They earned a living, but Sara always thought of her family as slaves to the king who demanded most of the crops they raised as tribute for the kingdom. She felt her mother and father had just given in long ago. But not Sara. She didn't like the king. She never asked for a king and she didn't want a king. She stubbornly refused to submit to this oppressive tyrant. She didn't care what he wanted; she would do what she wanted.

The king's procession was coming through the countryside, travelling the road that passed by her parent's tiny house. The sound of trumpets filled the air and a herald called out to the people of the countryside who had gathered along the dusty road. “Give praise to your king!” he said. “Give praise to your king!” The people clapped and cheered as the king's procession approached and as the king's carriage finally passed before their eyes. They appreciated the fact that the king's men kept them safe, that they had roofs over their heads and food on their tables. But not Sara. She didn't like the king. She never asked for a king and she didn't want a king. She worked her way to the front of the crowd and stood within full sight of the king's soldiers. She stood with arms crossed and an angry scowl on her face as she stared straight at the king's carriage coming her way. Again the herald cried out, this time looking right at the teenage girl. “Give praise to your king!” he shouted sternly, above the noise of the crowd. But Sara refused, not realizing what was about to happen to her.

Today on Christ the King Sunday, we hear that Jesus is a King. His Kingdom is made up of heaven and earth and the entire universe. He rules over all people—some are like Sara and some are like the people who honestly cheered their king. This morning the words of the Apostle John will cause you to consider the greatness of Jesus and will move you to

**GIVE PRAISE TO YOUR KING** because

- 1. HE IS THE FAITHFUL WITNESS**
- 2. HE IS THE FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD**
- 3. HE IS THE KING OF KINGS**

In the first chapters of Revelation, Jesus gives a command to John to write letters to seven churches. No doubt you noticed that John writes in the name of the triune God when he says,

**Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ.** He is addressing Christians like you and me and what he had to tell them then is just as important for you and me. John is a herald announcing the King. Today this herald of the gospel tells us some things about our King that we simply must know and which will cause our hearts and voices to overflow with praise for our King!

## 1. HE IS THE FAITHFUL WITNESS

As John describes Jesus, his words really provide reasons to give praise to our Savior. He first calls Jesus **the faithful witness**. We have every confidence that the words of the Bible are inspired by the Holy Spirit and without error even though God used men—like John—to write them down. Because of that, we can call John—the author of the Gospel of John, the brief letters 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> John and also Revelation—A faithful witness of God. But Jesus is much more than that. He is not A faithful witness; he is THE faithful witness! He is a witness above all others, the perfect witness.

The kind of witness Jesus was is part of what makes him your King who is worthy of praise. Listen to what John wrote in his gospel: **No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only (that is, Jesus), who is at the Father's side, has made him known (John 1:18).** Maybe you recall from the Old Testament accounts that to look the holy God in the face would result in certain death for a sinful person. Remember when God said to Moses, **“you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.” Then the LORD said, “There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen (Exodus 33:20-23).”**

A person might legitimately ask then, *“How can I know what God is like if I can't even see him?”* Well, God made a way. He sent his one and only Son into this world. In fact, next week we begin the season of Advent where we start preparing to celebrate Jesus coming into the world. No one has ever seen God, but Jesus has made him known. He is **the faithful witness**. If you know Jesus, then you know the loving God, just as God tells us in another place in Scripture: **The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being (Hebrews 1:3).**

If you want to know God, all you need to do is look at Jesus. He came into this world to be God's message of love to all people. He faithfully represented God to the world and he was faithful to his Father's plan of salvation. Without Jesus, we would not know all of the wonderful, glorious things we know about our God. But because you, along with John, see Jesus as **THE FAITHFUL WITNESS**, you respond by **GIVING PRAISE TO YOUR KING!**

## 2. HE IS THE FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD

You know, you and I have something in common with Sara, that stubborn young maiden who rejected her king. Really, we're exactly like her when it comes to accepting Jesus as our King. We won't do it and we can't do it! The king provided Sara with work, land, home, food, family, and safety from those who would harm her. But that's not the way Sara looked at the king. She saw him as the boss, the one who told her what she had to do, the one who demanded obedience and praise.

The awful part of each of us, which we call the sinful nature, is so terrible that it can only see Jesus as Sara saw her king. From the time we are conceived and born, we stand there—arms crossed, scowl on our face, staring Jesus down and rejecting him as our king. *“No one is going to rule over me! I want the freedom to do whatever I want!”* What the sinful nature doesn't know—or doesn't believe—is what Sara didn't realize: that kind of attitude leads to prison and punishment. For Sara, it was a dungeon far away from the king and his blessings where she—even though she was just a teenage girl—was punished and tortured. People who are sinful and rebellious to the very core of their being, who have a snotty, selfish, rejecting attitude toward Jesus as their King, are led to the eternal dungeon of hell, far away from the blessings of God in heaven, a place where there is punishment and torture of both body and soul that will never end.

Because of sin, this ought to be the eternal future for all people. But the King has come to our rescue! John reminds us of that with the second title he gives to Jesus: **the firstborn from the dead**. He also says that Jesus **loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood**. As Christian people, you know the background to those words. Sara's king would never have single-handedly ridden into life-threatening danger to save her or her and her family or all the people he ruled over. He would send soldiers—lots of them—to try to protect his people. But what did our King do? He came from heaven—all by himself. He came to do the things we couldn't do—to obey every single law, every little nuance of the Father's will for people. And he did it despite all evil forces opposing him. He did it despite temptations of every kind. He did it despite the ingratitude of the very people he came to save. He did it. And then he died. The King died as a sacrificial Lamb whose perfect life was credited to all sinners as blood ran down from his kingly crown of thorns and he uttered the words that matter most: **“It is finished.”** It was finished; the payment for sin was made in full. His body was taken down from the cross and it was put in a burial cave. Like every kind of king before him, his dead body was laid to rest. But it turns out this King was different.

Three days later **The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead... (Matthew 28:5-7).** John was one of those disciples who actually ran to the tomb and found it empty. He knew from firsthand experience that Jesus is **the firstborn from the dead**, meaning that Jesus was the first to physically die and physically be raised to life never to die again. But he won't be

the last—and this is what makes him the King worthy of your praise. Remember that he did this for you! Listen to the way the Apostle Paul explained this: **But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him (1 Corinthians 15:19-23).**

We needed this King to be our Savior—to free us from our sins, to remove the sins we commit even now sometimes when we do not praise Jesus and even defiantly oppose him and his will for our lives. Without Jesus and his forgiveness, we would not have the sure hope of eternal life. Give thanks to God that he has given you saving faith in Christ as your living Savior and King. Along with John, you see Jesus as **THE FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD** and you respond by **GIVING PRAISE TO YOUR KING!**

### **3. HE IS THE KING OF KINGS**

Jesus is not just any king. No other king has ever done any of these things. Jesus did them because he loves us and he did them by his almighty power. That divine power of Christ is what makes him the third thing John calls him: **the ruler of the kings of the earth.**

Certainly Jesus is the King who rules and serves the people who put their trust in him. We call that kingdom his “Kingdom of Grace.” We also speak of his “Kingdom of Glory,” that is his eternal rule over heaven. But here we see our Savior as the King of kings. We call this his “Kingdom of Power” because he rules over every worldly power. All things in this world are under his control. There is no power on this earth that overrules him. And we have the assurance that our King rules over all things in this world in the interest of his people, his Church, as God says elsewhere in the Bible: **And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (Ephesians 1:22-23).**

There are plenty of kings and kingdoms in this world who do not recognize Jesus as ANY kind of king, much less their king. John calls them **“the peoples of the earth.”** On the Last Day when Jesus, the King of all, returns **every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.** All people who rejected Jesus as their Savior and King will see Jesus and their mourning will never end because they will be separated from him for all of eternity. You however—along with all who by the power of God’s Holy Spirit have trusted in Jesus and served in this lifetime as priests in his kingdom—will **GIVE PRAISE TO YOUR KING** as you realize that your faith in him has not been in vain! You will see that he is who he said he was—**the Alpha and the Omega...the Lord God... the One who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.** And you will GIVE PRAISE TO YOUR KING, giving him glory and praise forever and ever. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.