

REV 1.5,6: GLORY TO JESUS!

Central Baptist Church, Chelmsford 22/4/07

I wonder whether anybody here has come reluctantly to church today?

You are only here, because you feel it is your duty to be here.

Your heart is not in the service. For you are feeling down in the dumps – everything in life seems to be against you – things are going wrong, at home, at work, or wherever. You feel depressed perhaps – depressed with the world, maybe even depressed with the church, and certainly depressed with life.

The result is that today's worship is a pain.

The more exuberant the song, the worse you feel.

The last thing you really feel like is praising God.

If this is how you feel, then this sermon is for you.

For I want you to look away from yourself and your situation, and look to Jesus.

Look away from your present cares and concerns, and look to Jesus, and you will discover that you can begin to cope with your cares and concerns.

My text is found in Rev 1.5,6: **“He loves us, and by his sacrificial death he has freed us from our sins, and made us a kingdom of priests to serve his God and Father. To Jesus Christ be the glory and power for ever and ever”**.

Here we have the final doxology in the New Testament.

Do you know the difference between a benediction and a doxology.

A benediction is a blessing pronounced upon a congregation of worshippers.

A doxology is praise addressed to God.

Our English word ‘*doxology*’ comes from the Greek word for ‘glory’ – doxa.

In this final doxology in the New Testament John cries out ‘Glory to God’.

Or rather, in this instance, he cries out ‘Glory to Jesus’.

Normally a doxology is addressed to God Almighty – but not here.

If the truth be told, this is no big deal. We should not distinguish overly between the Father and the Son – for as John reminds us in his gospel, to see the Son is to see the Father. As he wrote at the beginning of his Gospel: **“No one has ever seen God. The only Son, who is the same as God and is at the Father's side, he has made him known”** (John 1.18)

To ascribe glory to Jesus is indeed tantamount to ascribing glory to God.

So let's look at the doxology: and as we do so we shall discover that it is in effect a three-fold doxology. This is not clear in the GNB – but listen to the NRSV: “To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen”.

God is praised for three reasons:

1. God loves us – To God be the glory!
2. God has freed us – To God be the glory!
3. And God has made us kings and priests – To God be the glory!

1. TO HIM WHO LOVES US – BE GLORY!

God loves us – he loves you, he loves me.

Here is the one certainty amidst a world of uncertainties – the one sure conviction on which we can gamble our souls – the rock on which we can build our lives.

God loves us.

True, God is a holy God, consumed by a passion for justice and righteousness.

In the words of the writer to the Hebrews, “**Our God is a destroying fire**” (Hebs 12.29).

But this God loves us. He loves us, in spite of our failings and our sins.

Here is a revolutionary message.

Alas, we’ve heard it so often, that we’ve become blinded to the wonder of it all.

Listen to Emil Brunner, an eminent Swiss theologian: “*The statement ‘God is love’ points to the very heart of the message of the New Testament, of the Christian Gospel...*

The message that God is Love is something wholly new in the world. We perceive this if we try to apply the statement to the divinities of the various religions of the world:

Wotan is Love, Zeus, Jupiter, Brahma, Ahura, Mazda, Vishun, Allan is Love. All these combinations are obviously wholly impossible” (The Christian Doctrine of God, 183).

But the glory of the Christian religion is that God is a God of love.

We only have to look at Jesus to know how true that is. In the words of John 3.16, the most famous text in the Bible: “**God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son**”.

God didn’t simply feel loving toward us – he expressed his love for us – **he gave his only Son** - Jesus is God’s love in action.

In our English language an ‘*act of God*’ is normally associated with a disaster of some kind or another. It is a word often found in the small print of an insurance document – we are willing to cover everything bar an ‘act of God’. But God’s love in Jesus is the very opposite of a disaster – it is the greatest blessing that anybody could ever experience.

And yet God’s love in Jesus has something in common with the insurers’ ‘*act of God*’.

For the insurance agent, an ‘act of God’ is ‘something which no reasonable man could have expected’ – and the same definition applies to this greatest of blessings.

God’s love in Jesus is totally unwarranted and undeserved – it is totally unreasonable, and yet wonderfully true!

To go back to the text: do note that John does not say God “loved us” – but rather he says that in Jesus God “**loves us**”.

John uses the present – not past – tense. He is not speaking of a past event.

God’s love in Jesus is ongoing – it is continuous.

The love of Jesus seen

- In Bethlehem, where he shared our human lot
 - In Galilee where he laid hands on the sores of a leper
 - At Calvary where he experienced the torture of the cross
- is the love which loves you and me today, tomorrow and forever.

“**He loves us**”. His love is eternal: yesterday, today and forever..
But in particular, his love is with us now..

When Christians say the Creed they use the past tense: “*I believe in Jesus, his only Son our Lord, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified dead and buried, the third day he rose again from the dead*”. All this is very true – but it is not enough to speak of God acting in the past..

What matters is that you also know God in the present tense

Do you know that he loves you – that even now your name is written across his heart.

However lonely and rejected you may feel, Jesus loves you
However much of a failure you may feel, Jesus loves you
However unloving and unlovable you may be, Jesus loves you.

To God who loves us - to him be the glory!

2. TO HIM WHO FREED US – BE GLORY

In the second part of this doxology, there are two possible translations.

- Some of you may be familiar with the AV translation which speaks of Jesus having “**washed us**” from our sins. Similarly Peterson in *The Message* gives glory to Jesus “who blood-washed our sins from our lives”
- But the GNB, the NRSV and almost all the other modern verses speak of Jesus having “**freed**” us from our sins.

The fact is that the text of the original Greek is in question. Did John write *elousan* or *elusan*? The two words sound the same, but one has the Greek letter o (omicron) in it, and the other hasn't; one means: he has freed us, the other means he has washed us. It makes little theological difference: for the Christ who has freed us from the chains of sin, is also the Christ who has washed us from the stains of sin. But the GNB version is preferable, because of the contrast: one we were *slaves* to sin – but now we have been freed to become *kings*

There is another apparent difference of translation.

- The GNB reads: “**by his sacrificial death he has freed us from our sins**”.
 - The NRSV reads: “**he has freed us from our sins by his blood**”
- Did John speak of “**blood**” of Jesus, or of the “**sacrificial death of Jesus**”?

Literally John wrote: “**by his blood**” – so the NRSV is therefore more accurate. Blood was very significant for the Jewish sacrificial system: “**The life of every living thing is in the blood... Blood, which is life, takes away sins**” (Lev 17.11) But on the basis of texts such as Lev 17.11 the term “**blood**” came to be used a metaphor for the life of Jesus laid down. Hence the GNB translation: “**by his sacrificial death he has freed us from our sins**”.

The fact is that the crucifixion itself involved very little blood: so when the NT writers speak of “**the blood of Jesus**”, they are often just using a vivid metaphor for “the death of Jesus”.

Yet there are advantages in retaining the term **blood** here – for it reminds us of the occasion centuries before when God has used blood to save his people. On the night of the Passover the angel of death passed over the hymns of the Jews because lambs' blood had been daubed on the lintels and door posts. As a direct result of that terrible night Pharaoh allowed the people of Israel to go free. Likewise we have been set free – set free by the blood of Jesus our Passover lamb – set free not from slavery to sin and death.

Here is good news indeed.

For as we are, all of us are in the grip of sin and death.

To quote the apostle Paul's words to the Romans: "**everyone has sinned and is far away from God's saving presence**" (Rom 3.23). None of us can deny it – we need only to look into our own heart and we are reminded of those times when we have blundered, and failed God and one another.

To compound matters, "**the wages of sin is death**" (Rom 6.23 NRSV).

Sin's inevitable outcome is to be condemned to an eternity without God.

But God in Christ has come to our rescue – by his sacrificial death he has freed us from our sins.

When St Augustine was dying, he asked one of his friends to paint on the wall opposite his bed the words of Psalm 32.1: "**Happy are those whose sins are forgiven, whose wrongs are pardoned**". As the darkness gathered in and he lay there dying, he gazed at those words, steadying his soul.

Although at the time of his death he was recognised as a great theologian, he knew that as a young man he had played the field – he had well and truly sown his wild oats. But he also knew that he had been freed from his past through the sacrificial death of Jesus.

We can face the future – we can face the present – as forgiven men and women.

In the words of the old hymn: "*Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven/Who like me his praise should sing*"

Yes: To him who has freed us – be glory!

3. TO HIM WHO MADE US KINGS AND PRIESTS – BE GLORY

Literally John writes: "**To him who had made us a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory**" (NRSV).

John is here borrowing language from the Old Testament. For at Mount Sinai the Lord had declared that if they obeyed him, they would be a "priestly kingdom" (Ex 19.4,5). Israel had failed to live up to its calling – she had not kept the covenant. So the promise is transferred to the Christian church.

In effect John says that God in Christ has done two things:

i) He has made us kings

We were slaves – slaves to the power of sin – but now we are kings – sharing in the life of the King of kings. What a wonderful privilege is ours.

Samuel Rutherford, a 17C Scottish pastor & theologian, when writing from Aberdeen prison, instead of giving as his address ‘Aberdeen gaol’, write: “*From my King’s palace, Aberdeen.... I have a king’s life with Christ*”.

Have we got that kind of positive spirit in our religion? The early church had. To the 2C sceptic Celsus, the followers of Jesus appeared to have little going for them: “*Just look at them, a poor, pathetic conglomeration of slaves & artisans & illiterates and nonentities – they are the off-scourings of the world*”.

Certainly in the eyes of the world they were a pretty unimpressive bunch: “*few*” were “**wise or powerful or of high social standing**” (1 Cor 1.26).

And yet all of them were sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ – and as such not just anybody’s equal – they were more than anybody’s equal.

The last thing Christians should suffer from is a negative self-image.

We may be sinners, but we are sinners saved by grace, and as such heirs of the kingdom. We belong to royalty!

What’s more, we do not belong to the tarnished House of Windsor – we are members of ‘the household of God’. Wow! What a privilege.

But privilege leads us to responsibility

ii) He has made us priests

What is a priest? A priest is a person who comes between God and his creatures.

A priest is a bridge between God and his creatures. Indeed, the Latin word for a priest is ‘*pontifex*’ - bridge-builder.

John here declares that we are called to be priests, bridge-builders – in our words and actions we are called to make God known to the world.

For the God who loves us is the God who loves all other too.

When Jesus died on the Cross, he died not only for our sins, but also for the sins of the whole world.

We cannot keep the good news of salvation to ourselves.

Good news is for telling – for sharing.

It is not an easy job – but it is a part of our sacrificial service.

We are called to give ourselves on the altar of God

So, in summary: “**He loves us - he has freed us from our sins -he has made us kings and priests**”

Here is cause for praise indeed. To Jesus be all the glory.