

The King and His Kingdom

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everybody. It's good to worship with you all. I know that we've gotten a few newcomers just the past couple of weeks. So if I haven't gotten a chance to meet you, my name is Ed.

I'm a pastoral resident here at Trinity Cambridge. And if you're like, what the heck does that mean? I don't know what that means. Trust me, I didn't make these titles. It just essentially means that I'm a pastor in training and that Lord willing, one day I'll be able to serve here as an ordained elder. And it also means that I have the opportunity to be able to bring to you God's word so often. And so today we're going to continue on in our sermon series in Exodus. I was about to say Exodus. In Revelation, we're going to continue on with our second sermon. And our passage today is in Revelation 1, 4 to 8. If you're new here and you don't have a Bible and you would like one, please just raise your hand. One of our members will be happy to get you one. It'll be an ESV Bible in that translation, which is a really great translation for you to study and read for your own. Again, it's Revelation 1, 4 to 8. Let's bow our heads in prayer before the reading and preaching in God's word. Father, we are so small and you're so big. God, we are one church in one city, in one state, in one country, in one planet, in one galaxy amongst the vastness of your creation. And yet you care for us. What is man that you care for him? Thank you, Lord, that you meet us here. We pray that your spirit would move in these next 45 minutes to see just how big of a God you are and how small we are so that all the glory of the dominion could be attributed rightly to you, God. Please address us by your word. Please use me. Pray that anything that comes out of my lips would be most pleasing to you, that you would be lifted up in our hearts. In Jesus' name, amen.

Let's stand for God's word in Revelation 4 to 8. John, to the seven churches that 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 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of kings on earth, to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us a kingdom, priest to his God and father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

[3 : 23] Behold, he is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. This is God's holy and authoritative word. You may be seated.

I want to see if we can do something new this morning and get some participation in the sermon. And so, we're going to do something very simple. I'm going to ask you just two very simple questions.

And I would ask that you actually keep your eyes closed so that we could keep this process as anonymous as possible. So you could feel free to answer honestly. Very two simple questions. I'm going to ask you if you've ever had these thoughts, okay?

And on the count of three, you're just going to raise your hand. So the first question is, have you ever had this thought, my life is very hard.

[4 : 30] My life is very hard. On the count of three, you could raise your hand. One, two, three. Great. Keep your eyes closed.

And the second question is this, being a Christian makes my life harder. Being a Christian makes my life harder.

In other words, my life would be easier if I weren't a Christian. Have you ever had that thought in your life? Great. You guys can put your hands down. And you can open up your eyes. So we

basically had 100% agreement, right, for the first question as a poll result.

To the people who didn't raise your hand, I want to talk to you. I want to know what your life is like. I could use some of your optimism a little bit, I think. Because we know that it's really an, it's a universal truth that life is hard.

It could be unbearably hard sometimes. There are some really difficult things that we have to process, we have to endure. But to the second question, we had about, I think, 75, 80% of you guys, from my crude math, agree to that statement.

[5 : 43] And to be honest, I would have raised my hand. Because I've struggled with that thought in my life. There have been moments where I just felt like the Christian life was so hard.

You may not think of yourself as such, but to be a Christian means that you're a fighter. And you're fighting this battle against three fronts. You're fighting against your own flesh, the world and its temptations, and Satan.

And this fight never stops. In certain seasons, this fight can feel overwhelming and discouraging.

What about for those who are even physically persecuted for their faith?

How do you think they might answer that question? By God's grace, we live in a country here where we don't have to worry about physical persecution, right? We could put up our signs in East Cambridge openly.

We come here, gather, not worrying about any militant groups breaking in, the government finding us out, throwing us in jail, maybe even taking our lives. But this is not a privilege that many brothers and sisters in this world get to share in.

[6 : 58] So there's some truth that on earth, their lives simply are harder for following after Jesus. After all, Jesus never promised that it would be easy.

How then are we to overcome our sin, this evil world, and Satan? John opens his letter to suffering Christians to remind them who our God is.

How big of a God he is. That he is the king. He reigns on his throne. And that makes us then his kingly priests. That transforms our identities.

So he wanted to communicate that when we receive new identities by grace and peace, we can ascribe glory and dominion to the returning God in any and all circumstances of our lives.

So specifically, we're going to talk about all that the sovereign God offers us so that we can endure.

We can continue to worship. We can act as his priests. We're going to talk about, first, the grace and peace that he offers.

[8 : 09] Second, the new identities that he offers us as royal priests. And three, the hope and help that he offers. So we get into the text today.

John begins with a simple greeting, both to identify himself and the recipients, which are the seven churches in Asia Minor. And this is really a good opportunity to kind of set the stage of the letter.

Sean helpfully outlined last week some very good reasons to identify the author of the letter as John. John the Apostle, who also wrote the Gospel. And first, second, and third John as well.

For the recipients, we read that John addresses the seven churches. He addresses them later in verse 11 as Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Saratira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

It's quite a curious thing, really, though, that John chooses only these seven because historically we know that there are more than seven well-known churches in that area. And we don't have any historical data that suggests that John had a particularly special relationship with these seven churches.

[9 : 22] And so, therefore, as we'll counter with many times preaching through Revelation, that it seems like the best answer is that John chose the number seven both symbolically and intentionally.

John talked about this last week, but representing wholeness and perfect completion in the creation account from Genesis, John seems to use this symbolism to address not just the seven churches alone, but really the universal church throughout history.

This also makes sense throughout the course of this book because really after chapters one through three, the church depicted is not just these seven churches alone, but it's really, again, the universal church.

So while Sean taught us that Trinity Cambridge Church, living in 2023, we are not the original audience of this letter. Still, though, that there is a spiritual aspect that John and Jesus is addressing us today.

And right here in this opening reveals a fact about Revelation that I think a lot of us tend to forget or neglect when we're reading this text.

[10 : 35] It's that it's a prophetic, apocalyptic letter. It's a letter. And if it's a letter, what is it about? What is he trying to address?

What is he trying to say to these people? If you read through Revelation, you'll know how much it suffers, or focuses on suffering and enduring as Christians.

In the church of Pergamum, a fellow believer, Antipas, he was murdered. He was martyred for his Christian faith. Imagine just the wave of terror that would sweep over our own church.

If Sean, if one of our leaders, that he was martyred, he or she were martyred for her faith. On top of that, there's an overall tone in this letter that even more suffering is headed their way.

For example, Jesus addresses the church in Smyrna. He says this, Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation.

[11 : 44] Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. Later in chapter 6, verse 11, John writes that the number of martyrs is not yet completed, but it will be, signifying that there are many more deaths to come.

This persecution matches what we know historically as well. By the year 113 AD, about 20 years of our best guess of when Revelation was written, about 20 years later, we have evidence of a letter of a Roman governor whose name is Pliny the Younger, and he writes this letter to Trajan, who is Domitian's successor.

He's the emperor. And in this letter, he calls Christianity a cult contagion. Then the emperor replies that convicted Christians, they should be put to death.

Only by worshiping the emperor's image and by cursing the name of Christ can they be acquitted.

So one of John's main objectives in this letter was to encourage Christians by showing them, although they are so frightened, by showing them the truth of the world as seen from God's vantage point, from the throne.

That's been a very convicting thought for me as of late, something that Sean himself has prayed for me, that I would see the problems, the difficulties of my life, from not my perspective, but really from God's perspective.

[13 : 21] Because the simple truth is that God is bigger than my problems. We understand things very relative, right? I think, honestly, I think I'm pretty average height for an Asian, right?

Five-eight-ish. But when I talk to someone like Joseph Johnson, I feel short. I feel short. And when I look, because I'm so small, when I look at my problems, they look so big.

They look like mountains. But when I look at my problems from God's perspective, from the throne, they look small. When my problems seem bigger and bigger in my life, it's because, really, that God is smaller to me.

Maybe I'm forgetting him altogether. So I encourage you to remember this throughout reading Revelation, that Revelation is often treated like this cryptic 10,000-piece puzzle that only the smartest can put together.

It's not both John and Jesus' intention. They wrote this to churches 2,000 years ago and to us as an encouragement.

[14 : 30] That's the focus. It's an encouragement. To bolster the faith of suffering Christians, to persevere to the end for God's glory. So knowing their difficult condition, John opens this letter in a most appropriate way.

He communicates and extends grace and peace that comes from the sovereign, triune God. Really, first of all, what an insight into God's heart that the first thing, the first thing he wants to get off his chest is this blessing of grace and peace.

We know that reading in chapters 2 and 3 that these churches, they're not perfect. They're not perfect churches. They are led astray by false teaching and sin.

Some have lost their first loves. And I've wondered what God, what Jesus might say to our own church because we're not a perfect church. We're not full of perfect people.

But still, the very first thing that God wants to communicate to you is grace and peace. Most of us are well familiar with the word grace and its definition of undeserved favor.

[15 : 43] We're saved by grace alone as taught in Ephesians 2, meaning that we don't deserve salvation. We don't deserve a relationship with our creator. But in scripture, grace is also more than

that.

It's also a power that enables us to endure any hardship. Paul speaks to this powerful enabling grace in 2 Corinthians 12 that enables him to endure all weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.

It's because of this undeserved gift of grace that we now have this empowering gift of grace so that we can continue to worship in any and all circumstances. And have you ever noticed that this order of this greeting in NT Epistles, right?

It's always grace first, then peace. Grace first, then peace. For it's only when things are right between us and God, our creator, it's only when the weight of sin on our consciences are removed can we really have meaningful peace in our lives.

For peace in the American culture tends to mean to us lack of conflict, especially in military contexts. And in scripture, it totally can mean that.

[16:58] But the word peace ultimately comes from the Hebrew word shalom, which refers more to the state of completeness, fullness, fullness, wholeness.

Like a building can be shalom, meaning that it has no holes or cracks. Or Job, he says that his state, his tents are in a state of shalom because when he counted his flock, there were none missing.

But it's not just our stuff that can be in a state of shalom. Our own hearts, our souls can be cold or complete. That feeling where you feel like just nothing is missing and everything is as it's supposed to be.

Where are you this morning? Are you at shalom in your soul? As you endure very real trials and wade through life's difficulties, what do you feel like you're missing?

Imagine what the original audience might have said that they were missing. Physical safety, right? With their own government hunting them down, with loved ones dying around them, with the tremendous fear and anxiety over their heads.

[18:17] I wonder if the offer of grace and peace, it could easily sound like a rote Christian platitude. We feel that when we're suffering so much that somebody flippantly says something to us.

But it only sounds like a platitude if the offer is empty. If the person offering can't back it up. But notice in our text, where did this offer come from?

It comes from the triune God who can back up this offer. In verse four, we have first a description of God the Father who is the one who is and who was and who is to come.

This is such an awesome, profound title. This is a strong allusion to Exodus 3.14, where God revealed his covenant name to Moses.

When Moses asked God what he should tell the people if he was asked about God's name, God says, I am who I am. Or in the Greek translation, I am the one who is.

[19:22] But John clearly expands upon this name with a threefold temporal description of God's character. In this, he highlights God's eternality and atemporality, meaning that God is independent of time.

So God is the one who eternally was, who eternally is, and who eternally will be. He was in the beginning that had no beginning. That's just so profound.

If you just think about it, you can't even wrap your mind around that. But the revealing of this name is not just meant to be a cool, interesting theological fact. God revealed this name to a suffering enslaved people.

The context of Exodus 3.14 that we went through recently is that God saw the suffering of Israel and he cared for them. He saw his children Israel.

He sees his children today and he will see his children in decades to come. He is the sovereign, faithful God who knew their affliction.

[20:31] Rocky Balboa once quipped that time is undefeated. Time takes everyone out. All but our eternal God, whom time does not change, age, or weaken him.

It has absolutely no effect on his person, perfections, purposes, or promises. Grace and peace unchangingly comes from the eternally faithful one.

Second, we have grace and peace from the seven spirits who are before his throne. Some say that the seven spirits are seven angels, but I think a stronger interpretation is that the description refers to the singular third person of the Trinity, God the Spirit.

First, as they're listed one after the other, the seven spirits are presented to be on par with the Father and the Son. Moreover, it's unusual and ultimately inconceivable according to the rest of Scripture for angels to be the one extending grace and peace.

That prerogative belongs to God alone. But then why, again, use the number seven to describe a singular person of the Trinity? Again, this number signifies fullness, right?

[21 : 49] Here, it signifies what though? It signifies the fullness of the Spirit's activity and power. Moreover, it's likely John referenced the number seven to highlight the active work in helping the seven individual churches to endure and to shine their light.

Because where do we find the Spirit? The text makes it very clear to us that he's not on the throne, but he is before the Father's throne, which alludes to his role as an emissary, as a helper to carry out the bidding of God on behalf of his churches.

And this means that this same Spirit is at work in Trinity Cambridge this morning, today, in our hearts. He's not a distant God, but he is in this room ministering to us by the bidding of the Father. We have a great helper and advocate, someone who will come alongside us in any hardship and trial, grace and peace unchangingly comes from the eternally faithful one who is actively at work among us.

Thirdly, grace and peace come from God the Son. John shines the spotlight on Jesus with this threefold description of how Jesus is prophet, priest, and king.

[23 : 13] Likely referring to Psalm 89, John describes Jesus as these three things, as the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. First, Jesus is the faithful witness.

A witness, what does he do? He testifies in court to what he or she knows is the truth. Jesus testified that he is the light of the world, that he is the bread from heaven, that he is the foretold suffering servant, that he is the promised Messiah and king who's come to lay down his life for his friends.

Even when the world hated his light and loved the darkness, he didn't stop. He continued to preach and teach the truth. And what did he get for that?

Spit. Floggings. A crown of thorns. A cross. But praise be to God that Jesus came back to life, conquering sin and death.

So John bestows this honorific of the firstborn of the dead. In Jewish culture, firstborns were given particularly a special inheritance and significance.

[24 : 28] And this title still carries that same emphasis of high exaltation, high privileged position of the firstborn of the dead, of the resurrected God, man. Why?

Because Jesus is the one who leads us as a champion in resurrection. Meaning that if we are faithful unto death, we will be resurrected in power. Isn't this such a glorious reality?

I almost can't even believe it sometimes. Just writing this sermon, thinking about it. Me, this guy, I'm gonna defeat death. I'm gonna resurrect. I'm gonna be like Jesus.

It's such a glorious reality that I don't think enough about, that I don't think enough of us think about. And finally, it's not just a ruling over the new creation, but the current world that Jesus, through his death and resurrection, stands as a ruler of kings on earth.

Despite earthly tyrants and dictators, both past and present, who have attempted to eliminate the worship of our one true God, they have not, they are not, and they will not succeed.

[25 : 37] They will never win. The gates of Hades will never prevail against Jesus' church. No matter what our state, the world is in, come 10, 50, 100 years, no matter who is elected next year or elections to come, no matter how much Christians are hated or persecuted, he is still the king of kings who reigns on his throne.

Friends, that means that no matter what happens to us, we are on the winning side. And just like John's gospel in Revelation, John continues this sense of irony that really it's Jesus' death and defeat that were actually his path to glory and victory over Satan and death.

So back when the Roman government martyred Christians to now when Boko Haram or Burkina Faso, they martyr Christians today, they play the same losing strategy that Satan tried with Jesus. For Jesus teaches that those who will lose their life will find them. Those who try to save them will lose them. The first shall be last, the last shall be first. The economy of the kingdom is radically opposite of the economy of this world.

the path of carrying your cross and dying to self, that's the path to victory and glory. And when we feel like that path is just so hard, when suffering is just too much, I pray that we would see that

there's no other place to go.

[27 : 18] Like the disciples, may we see that only Jesus has the words of eternal life. As Jesus said in John 14, 27, peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you.

Those other places all pale in comparison to the peace that God, that Jesus alone brings. He alone brings amazing grace and fullness. Just a feeling that everything is as it's supposed to be.

Even when our circumstances don't prove it, John Patton is a great example of this. A missionary to the New Hebrides who ministered to literal cannibals.

He once explained one night when his life was in eminent danger from the people that he tried to minister to. And he wrote this, I climbed into the tree and was left there alone in the bush.

The hours I spent there all lived before me as if they were but of yesterday. I heard the frequent discharging of muskets and the yells of savages. Yet I sat there among the branches as safe as in the arms of Jesus.

[28 : 31] Never in all my sorrows did my Lord draw nearer to me and speak more soothingly in my soul than when the moonlight flickered among those chestnut leaves and the night air played on my throbbing brow as I told all my heart to Jesus.

Alone, yet not alone. grace and peace unchangingly comes from the eternally faithful one who is actively at work in us and who leads us in victory.

And because of this grace and peace that leads us to worship with new identities, for John knows himself as one who is loved.

For John, right, the love of God is so closely linked to the cross of Christ that whenever he talks about love, he always presents it right immediately after that the cross is right there.

That's what he's thinking about when he thinks about being loved. So when you doubt God's love for you because of your sin, because of your problems, because of your hurts, look first to the cross for evidence of his love.

[29 : 42] After all, as Jesus said, greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. This is so real to John because he knows what Jesus freed him from.

Jesus teaches in John 8, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. I wonder as Christians if we understand the magnitude of this freedom and transformation.

Because before Christ, sin ruled over us. Satan was our God, as Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 3. We were snared by the devil and he held us as prisoners so that we invariably did his will.

Even when we wanted to do the right thing, we did what Satan wanted us to do. More than that, God intended for us to be his beloved children, but we instead became sons of Satan.

So instead of being covenant keepers, we were covenant breakers so that when God saw us, he saw our sin. Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, and things like these.

[30 : 59] Your most heinous sins, the stuff that you don't tell anybody else, that you won't even tell your spouse, your best friends, that stuff that you want to keep hidden as much as possible. God sees, and God saw all of that.

That's what you were defined by. But praise be to Jesus that what he said shortly after in John 8, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Because of Jesus, because of the work on his cross, those who put their total faith in him, we are set free from the shackles of sin and death. By his cross, he is restored to you.

That beloved identity of a child, his child, that those who are in Christ, nothing can separate you from the love of God.

John, in fact, keeps going with these new identities in Christ. He writes that Jesus made us kings and priests to him, to his God. This is a strong allusion to Exodus 19, which reads, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

[32 : 08] Notice how Moses stipulates how Israel was supposed to be a kingdom of priests. It's by obedience. It's by obeying God. But in our passage today, John does not say that we obeyed because we didn't.

It's by his blood. That's what our text says. He was our older brother. Jesus was our older brother who perfectly obeyed our righteous father while we arrogantly thought we knew better and we disobeyed.

But Jesus, he lovingly gave us the credit of his good work so that we get all the benefits while he took ownership of our disobedience. There is no possibility to boast in what we've done because of the new titles that we've received in Jesus.

It's all by grace. It's all by his work. And I want you to notice that John does not single out a group in these seven churches or calls them the royal priests.

He does not say, pastors, you are the royal priests or deacons, you are the priests. For John, the church is the royal priesthood. So I encourage you, every one of you as part of this church, don't fire yourselves.

[33 : 25] Don't fire yourselves from this position that you now hold in Christ. In the past, only the high priests could go into the Holy of Holies to bask in God's glory only one day of the year.

But now, we can claim this Christ-bought opportunity for an intimate relationship with our Father all year long. Claim and own this title that you have now in Jesus.

What is this job description as a royal priest? Peter helps us here in 1 Peter 2.9 in which he says, you are a royal priesthood that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

So as his royal priests proclaim his excellencies in the loudest praise, with the loudest praise, with joy on Sunday worship, worship.

As we stand and bask in his presence. As his priests, you need not go to any other priest for the confession of your sins. You can go straight to God and receive the assurance of pardon straight from him.

[34 : 33] As his royal priests, you can pass the same shalom to others that you've received and you can administer to others to help others' lives feel whole, feel like they're not missing anything.

You could do that. As his royal priests, you can with confidence draw near to the throne of grace through intercessory prayer that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in times of need.

As his royal priests, you have full access to the table. No intermediate is necessary. Nobody stands before you on the table. You have full access before it.

As his priests and ambassadors continue to proclaim his excellencies to your friends, your neighbors, your coworkers in evangelism and in testimony sharing. Proclaim not just with your lips but with your lives as priests, as kings would in holiness and self-sacrifice.

Proclaim his excellencies unceasingly no matter what season you're going through. In fact, that's when your worship is loudest. It's when nothing is going your way, when everything seems to be against you, when you say to him be glory and dominion forever and ever, people must see that Jesus is excellent.

[35 : 55] When you see your mountain-tall problems of a crumbling marriage, a rebellious child, a lost job, or failing health, and you still see that Jesus is bigger and better, that's an incredible testimony of a royal priest who knows their identity of freedom and of love.

Finally, we can only proclaim his worship and overcome hardship when we hope, when we have hope in the time that God will have final victory over his enemies.

Verse 7 quotes two OT verses in Daniel 7, Zechariah 12, and reads, Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes on the earth will wail on account of him, even so.

Amen. The first half of this verse comes from Daniel 7, where Daniel prophesies that despite the rule of four daunting, terrifying beasts, which are cruel, rapacious kingdoms, one will come like the Son of Man, and all dominion and glory will be attributed to him.

The beasts will be destroyed and burned with fire. So while we now, we still live in a beastly world that may be dominated by violent oppressors and ungodly opponents now, John is encouraging his audience and us that these evils, they will not reign forever.

[37 : 27] Jesus will return. It's not just a myth or some wishful thinking. It's a fact that when he comes with clouds on his divine glory and authority at the second coming, he will come to deliver the final and decisive judgment against all evil.

Our three-front battle against our flesh, the world, and Satan, it'll finally be over. And he will not come spiritually, he will not come secretly, but he will literally and physically come so that every eye will see him.

You see, the Bible is unambiguous about this, unambiguous about Jesus' second coming, just as it is unambiguous about his first coming 2,000 years ago.

Many scholars have come up with far-fetched theories and ideas that Jesus didn't actually die or didn't resurrect that faithful weekend. They say it was a mass hallucination, when in actuality, how often do you hear of a group all sharing one same hallucination?

They say that Jesus almost died, but not really. But how does one survive Roman floggings, asphyxiation on the cross, a spear to the side, or that they just simply misplaced the body?

[38 : 49] But then the Jews could easily identify the body. The best answer is that Jesus did die and did resurrect. And just as sure as we have that assurance, we can confidently know that Jesus will return.

And when he does, temporary hardship will give way to eternal joy and glory. And when he returns, Jesus, John teaches that all tribes, all believers from all over the world will wail on account of him. This fulfills Zechariah 12.10, in which the context is that God promises to defeat Israel's enemies and redeem Israel after they repent by the power of his spirit.

And so we who put our faith in Jesus, we're now the true Israel. And we fulfill this prophecy when we mourn and we wail over Jesus, whom we pierce with our sins.

2,000 years ago, we haven't physically pierced Jesus. We didn't physically crucify Jesus, but we hear our mocking voice call out among the scoffers. It was our sin that held him there.

[39 : 58] But blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. This is such an important marker, distinguisher of those who will be saved. They are repentant.

We mourn not over ourselves, but we mourn over Jesus. This is a great diagnostic test for us even today of true repentance because true repentance is Jesus-focused.

It's others-focused. It's not self-focused. But that's not to say that there will be people on that day who will mourn over themselves.

This is a hard word, but it is true. Over the way that they lived their life, over what they believed, over how wrong they have been. You will never have seen regret like you will that day.

And on that day, it would have been too late. The window of forgiveness would have been shut. Nothing more is, nothing more important is this truth here.

[41 : 04] What you believe in this temporary life has eternal consequences. Are you ready for that day that will come for a thief, like a thief in the night? Are you ready for that eternal future?

Randy Alcorn, pastor, theologian, has this great quote about the reality of heaven and hell. The best of life on earth is a glimpse of heaven, and the worst of life is a glimpse of hell.

For Christians, this present life is the closest they will come to hell. For unbelievers, it is the closest they will come to heaven. Our sincere hope is that the best of your life now, the best of the shalom that you may have experienced, cannot hold a candle to the awesome shalom, peace, glory, everything that you will experience with your future, with your creator.

If you do not know yet Jesus, and you have not put your faith in him, please come talk to us. Don't delay. Talk to us about the shalom that can be found in Jesus alone.

John ties up this section in verse 8 by repeating the Father's sovereign title. He declares that he is the Alpha and the Omega, the first letter of the Greek alphabet and the last.

[42 : 19] In other places in Scripture, God declares himself as the first and the last, the beginning and the end. In this metaphorical language, it highlights that God is sovereign over one end of the spectrum to the other, and everything in between.

God is sovereign over all, so that since history, it commences and concludes with him, no part will ever spin out of his control. So to him who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty, he is the one who has been your help, who is your help, and who will eternally be your help.

Living as Christians in this life, again, can be extremely hard. If you raised your hand earlier that you once had this thought that Christianity made your life harder, if you feel even now that the Christian life is so difficult, I want to affirm that an aspect of what you're feeling is right.

I think genuine discipleship, growing pains, shared suffering with Jesus, that can be painful and uncomfortable at times. After all, a disciple to be unchallenged by Jesus may not be a disciple at all. But friend, there's so much that you're missing if you're in that place now. You're missing the gospel. You're missing this grace and peace from this triune God who is eternally faithful to you, who's actively working for you, who has died for you.

[43 : 53] You're missing his tender love and what you've been freed from and these new identities in Christ. You're missing that Christ will return in power to make all that is wrong right.

Even when this refund battle against our flesh, the world's Satan seems overwhelming, the gospel alone will help you through your trials now and when things come your way that are far harder in the future, the gospel alone is the thing that will help you then.

Even if you think that things are going well right now, I encourage you to store up, well up, deep reservoirs of faith for years and years because you'll never know.

You'll never know when you have to tap into. To close, Charles Spurgeon speaks of God's help really better than I could have. It is but a small thing for me, your God, to help you.

Consider what I have done already. What? Not help you. Why? I bought you with my blood. Help you. It is the least thing I will ever do for you. I have done more and will do more.

[45 : 01] In helping you, I am giving you what I have bought for you already. If you had need of a thousand times as much help, I would give it to you. You require little compared to with what I am ready to give.

It's much for you to need, but it is nothing for me to bestow. Help you. Fear not. If there were an ant at the door of your granary asking for help, it would not ruin you to give him a handful of your wheat. And you are nothing but a tiny insect at the door of my all-sufficiency. I will help you. Do you want more wisdom than exists in the Father, more love than displays in the Son, or more power that is manifest in the influences of the Spirit?

The eternal God is your helper. Let's pray. Again, Lord, we pray that our visions of you would be big.

God, you are far too small in our eyes so that when we see the problems in our lives from your vantage point, from your perspective, they would seem small, that we would trust you in all things, and that you would be magnified and glorified.

[46 : 12] Help us to operate. Help us not to fire ourselves. Help us to operate as these royal priests so that we can proclaim your excellencies with our lips, with our lives, with our hands and feet, through it all, throughout whatever circumstances that you would be attributed, all the honor, all the glory, all the dominion.

God, help us as we continue to read and preach and study your word through revelation. Speak to us. Transform us. We want to be more like you. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.