

To Him Who Loved Us

Revelation 1:1–8

We have begun a series in the book of Revelation. Last we established the *topic*: “the revelation of Jesus Christ,” the *timing*: “the time is near,” and the *attitude*: worship. The book of Revelation is primarily a revelation of Jesus Christ, so our exegesis (explanation) must always be Christ-centered. Though it is a revelation of “things that must shortly come to pass”—namely, the Great Tribulation, the destruction of the temple, and God’s judgment on the unbelieving Jews, and also teaches us precious lessons concerning Christ’s second coming at the end of time, faithful exposition of the book of Revelation must always be centered on Christ and his worship. It was not intended to reveal God’s judgments upon the earth in the far-off future, thousands of years later; rather, as John testifies, “The time is near”; the Lord is speaking of events that would “shortly come to pass.”

The internal evidence reveals that Revelation was written in the late 60s of the first century, before the destruction of the temple at the hands of the Romans. David Chilton points out that while “some scholars have uncritically accepted the statement of St. Irenaeus (A.D. 120–202) that the prophecy appeared ‘toward the end of Domitian’s reign’ (i.e. around A.D. 96), there is considerable room for doubt about his precise meaning.”¹ The internal evidence, particularly the fact that the book speaks of the temple of God and never mentions that the temple was no longer standing—inexplicable, if it was written 26 years after the temple, the center and soul of the Jews’ religion, was no longer standing.

This afternoon we are going to take a deeper look at vv. 5–6, namely, the ascription “To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” This is a precious text indeed. We will consider three points: (1) Christ loved us. (2) Christ washed us from our sins. (3) Christ made us kings and priests to God. First,

1. Christ loved us.

“To Him who *loved* us . . . to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” Such love!

In the original the word “loved” is actually present tense: *loves*: “To him who *loves* us.” The sense “loved” is taken from the companion word “washed,” which is aorist. The aorist is one of the Greek past tenses (the others are *perfect*, *imperfect* and *pluperfect*). Each tense conveys a little different sense. I will have more to say about this under the next point.

¹ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, v.xxx.3; quoted by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*, iii.xviii.2–3; v.viii. 6, cited in David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

Our text says literally, “To him who loves us.” In the Bible the present tense can have the sense “keeps on loving.” God will never stop loving us. He can no more stop loving us than he can stop being God. His very nature is love. The prophet Jeremiah testified, “The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: ‘Yes, I have *loved* you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you. Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel!’” (Jer. 31:3–4). Here, the God of heaven appears to his prophet and tells him that he has loved his people with an everlasting love. The verb “I have loved you” is in the Hebrew perfect tense. The sense is “I have loved you”; that action is complete. “I the LORD do not change. I will never renege on my love. I determined to love you in eternity past, and I have never wavered and will never waver from that determination. I have set my love upon you and will never change my mind. My love for you will never change.”

This concept is hard for us to fathom. As humans, the objects of our love keep changing. We go through phases. At one period of our lives we are greatly interested in this or that thing. At another point we become interested in something else. People even do this in relationships. At one time they might have an ardent love for a certain person. Later on, that love might cool, and they will be more attracted to someone else. Some people go through serial relationships. We can think of any number of celebrities who have been married multiple times. A certain person will give them pleasure at one point in their life, but later on, another person will capture their fancy. Just this week I was reading about a person whose name is known to almost everybody in the western world. He and his girlfriend lived together for a number of years. Everybody wondered, will they ever get married? Finally, he proposed, and the couple had a storybook wedding. Yet people in the know affirm that he was cheating on his wife from the very beginning of their marriage. There is a lot of heartbreak that goes on behind the scenes!

But in the case of God’s love for his church, the story is even greater than we might first imagine, for in the case of God’s love for his people, we must remember that he loved those who were altogether *unlovely*! We were sinners, rebels, self-centered. We had, as it were, spit in the face of a holy God. When a man takes a wife, it is usually based, at least to some degree, on attraction. But we need to be realistic and acknowledge that God did not love us because we were attractive. Actually, we were the very opposite of attractive. We were enemies. We had no claim upon his love. As the hymnwriter put it, “Amazing love! How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?”² Yes, God’s love for us is utterly amazing!

“O love of God, how strong and true, eternal and yet ever new,
uncomprehended and unbought, beyond all knowledge and all thought! O love of

² Charles Wesley, <https://www.trinitypsalterhymnal.org/hymns/and-can-it-be-that-i-should-gain/> accessed 3-23-24

God, how deep and great, far deeper than man's deepest hate; self-fed, self-kindled like the light, changeless, eternal, infinite."³

God's love is amazing, God's love is infinite. God's love is displayed in Christ. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

O dear one, the infinite, eternal God, the creator of all things, the one who made us to be his own peculiar treasure, the God who holds all things by the word of his power, the God who runs the universe with flawless precision, the God with whom we have to do—*that* God loves us! He has loved us with an everlasting love. At the final day we will stand before the God who has loved us with an everlasting love.

Second,

2. Christ washed us from our sins.

"To Him who loved us and *washed* us from our sins in His own blood . . . to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Christ washed us from our sins. Some translations have "he loosed (or *freed*, or *released*) us from our sins."

On the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:15ff.), we read that the high priest, Aaron, "shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people, bring its *blood* inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat. So he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins; and so he shall do for the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness. There shall be no man in the tabernacle of meeting when he goes in to make atonement in the Holy Place, until he comes out, that he may make atonement for himself, for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel. And he shall go out to the altar that is before the Lord, and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the *blood* of the bull and some of the *blood* of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around. Then he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, *cleanse* it, and consecrate it from the *uncleanness* of the children of Israel" (Lev. 16:15–19).

Notice that it is the blood of the goat of the sin offering, sprinkled on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat, that makes atonement for the Holy Place, and the blood of the bull and the blood of the goat sprinkled on the horns of the altar, that cleanses it and consecrates it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel. Notice the importance of *blood*.

³ <https://www.trinitypsalterhymnal.org/hymns/o-love-of-god-how-strong-and-true/> accessed 3-23-24

In Numbers 35 we read that innocent blood, shed in murder and violence, “*defiles* the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the *blood* that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it.”

In our experience it is very difficult to wash away the stain of blood. But in God’s way of thinking, the only thing that can wash away sin is blood. Clearly, such language points ahead in history to the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross of Calvary. In regeneration, the Holy Spirit applies the blood of Christ to the stain of our sin. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.

There is a difference between the Byzantine and the Alexandrian texts at this point. The NKJV, translating the Byzantine text (the Greek New Testament that was in common use among the Greek-speaking peoples for hundreds of years), reads, “To Him who loved us and *washed* us from our sins in His own blood.” The ESV has “To him who loves us and has *freed* us from our sins by his blood.” In the Greek the difference between “washed” and “loosed” is the addition of one letter. “Loosed” (*freed, released*) sounds like this: λύσαντι. “Washed” sounds like this: λούσαντι. Either reading is possible, and both are true. Christ has *washed* us from our sins by his own blood. He has also *loosed* (freed, released) us from our sins by his own blood.

Under the last point I mentioned that the word for “washed” is aorist. The aorist is the Greek simple past. As far as the word “washed” goes, the aorist is the correct sense. It means that God washed us from our sins *at a point in past time*, that is, *at the crucifixion of Christ*. God does not have to keep washing us from our sins, as if the blood of Christ were ineffectual. When I throw a pair of pants into the washing machine to clean off some dirt, I am fully aware that I will again be washing them down the road. I know that they are going to get dirty again. But when Christ went to the cross to wash us from our sins in his own blood, his death encompassed *all* our sins, past, present and future. His work of atonement atoned for all our sins.

Jesus said, “Now ye are *clean* through the word which I have spoken unto you” (John 15:3). Again, “if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son *cleanseth* us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). The stain of our sins has been washed away by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Nothing else can wash away our sins. We cannot wash them away by our own self-effort. We cannot in our own selves satisfy for the punishment due to our sins, as the Roman Catholic Baltimore Catechism asserts.⁴ The only way we can be cleansed from our sins is through the blood of Christ. This, of course, does not appeal to the sinner’s natural pride. We like to think that we can contribute, at least in some small measure, to our own salvation.

⁴ “What is Purgatory? Purgatory is the state in which those suffer for a time who die guilty of venial sins, *or without having satisfied for the punishment due to their sins*” (Baltimore Catechism, Q. 1381).

But the gospel abases all human pride. We absolutely cannot save ourselves, but must rest in the finished work of Christ our Savior. Thirdly,

3. Christ made us kings and priests to God.

“To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and *has made us kings and priests to His God and Father*, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

This is both an Old Testament and New Testament theme.

In Exodus 19 God says, “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me *a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel” (Ex. 19:5–6).

The apostle Peter, alluding to this language, says, “Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5–6).

Again, he says, “you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

Here is the saints’ calling in this world.

Note: God made us kings and priests; he did *not* make us lawgivers! James says, “There is *one* lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy” (Jas. 4:12).

“The Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King; *He* will save us” (Isa. 33:22).

Christ loved us. Christ washed us from our sins. Christ made us kings and priests to God. Precious truths! Let us joyfully worship him who loved us, redeemed us unto God by his blood, and has made us kings and priests to God. Amen.