

**+ Revelation 1:4b-8 + You will Know Him When You See Him +
+ Last Sunday of End Time: Christ the King + 22 November 2009 +**

Has this ever happened to you? You have to go to the airport to pick someone up or you have to meet them at some public place. The problem is you've never met them in person. You've only spoken to them over the phone or connected with them by e-mail. In fact, under normal circumstances, you'd probably walk right past them in a crowd. So you wait for them at the designated spot, maybe even bring a sign with their name on it, and usually you make the connection rather quickly.

Sometimes in that situation, you get the benefit of a good description from someone you know. They may even tell you, "You'll know him when you see him." Of course, that makes identification in a crowd much easier and your friend is usually proven right. You do know them when you see them.

Another church year is coming to a close today, and you and I are watching for the arrival of someone we've never met in person, we've never contacted by phone or e-mail, and whose arrival has been a reason for waiting for over 2000 years. Today we wait with eager anticipation for the return of Christ the King, but how will we know him when he arrives? Fellow servants, **YOU WILL KNOW HIM WHEN YOU SEE HIM.**

The better the description, the easier it becomes to identify someone in a crowd, but how will you and I know Jesus? We're at a big disadvantage when it comes to knowing what Jesus looks like. The Apostle John, who wrote our text, followed Jesus for three years, but even he had a hard time recognizing Jesus when the Savior appeared to him in glory in the verses after our text. Not knowing what Jesus looks like could be quite troubling, especially when we consider how chaotic our world could be on that Last Day, but the truth is, **you already know how to identify Christ.**

Even though you have never seen Jesus in person, you know who he is through Holy Scripture. For that very reason, believers of every age have been able to identify Jesus. That was why God provided so many promises over so many years to his Old Testament believers, even down to details like his birthplace, the words he would speak, and his basic appearance. The Lord wanted his people to be able to identify the Christ. For us, who live after Jesus fulfilled those promises, it's no different. We know him through his Word. John's greeting before us is one of the best examples.

"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..." Before we hear a more specific description of Jesus, we are reminded that wherever he is and wherever you find his grace and peace, there you also find God the Father, the eternal and almighty Creator of the universe, and God the Holy Spirit, who changes hearts with the good news of Christ Jesus. This is important to remember because God the Son is perfectly united with the Father and the Holy Spirit as three persons yet one God—the Trinity.

Now that alone would make Christ easy to identify, but there's more as John describes the Son in greater detail. **"...and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth."** Let's take a closer look at those descriptions.

Jesus is **"the faithful witness"**. When Jesus left heaven to take on our human flesh, he came proclaiming the Word of God with the authority of God himself. You may recall times during Jesus' ministry when the people were amazed at how he preached as one **"with authority"** (Mark 1:27) In fact, Jesus once told the Pharisees, **"He who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world."** (John 8:26) Even in the face of great opposition from his enemies and suffering and death, Jesus remained faithful to the Word and will of his heavenly Father. He did that because you and I have been so unfaithful to the Word and will of God, so much quicker to claim our own authority, when we are really slaves to sin and Satan. For you, then, Jesus Christ came to witness faithfully by his life and teaching.

He is **"the firstborn from the dead"**. That happened on Easter morning, when Jesus abandoned his tomb forever. He didn't do it for himself. No, Jesus knew how terrible the wages of sin had become for humanity, how death has marked every one of us, and how every one of us is dying from the moment we are conceived. So he led the way from death to life as he crushed the power of death with his own glorious resurrection. St. Paul uses a similar picture in 1 Corinthians 15:(20), **"Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."** By rising from the dead, Jesus gave you full access to the holy God, guaranteed that you too would rise from the dead in glory, and guaranteed eternal life for you in heaven, as he promised, **"Because I live, you also will live."** (John 14:19)

For that reason, Jesus is also **"the ruler of the kings of the earth"**—the King of kings. Paul explained in Philippians 2:(9), **"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name..."** As king, Christ guides the past, the present, and the future for the good of his faithful people, even those

times when it seems everything and everyone is against us. So often we don't see that. So often we wonder if our Savior is powerless to control our crazy world, but on the Last Day, Christ will reveal himself for who he really is—the Lord of heaven and earth. ***“I am the Alpha and the Omega (the beginning and the end)...who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”***

Fellow servants of Christ, you know your king. You can and will identify him on the Last Day, but who he is doesn't matter, if you don't know what he has done. John puts those great deeds on display in a beautiful song of triumph. ***“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.”***

What did Christ the King do for you and me? ***“[He] freed us from our sins by his blood...”*** That deliverance goes farther back than the cross of Calvary. You see, when the time had fully come, God sent his Son to leave his heavenly kingdom to come to our corrupt world and take on our human flesh. He came to bring deliverance, redemption, freedom from the captivity and slavery and oppression of sin within us and in the world around us. That Savior came as a baby to free us by the shedding of his blood.

That holy infant grew through the challenges of childhood and the troubles of the teenage years into an adult. At that time, he began to proclaim the good news of sins forgiven. He wiped out the effects of sin like illness and uncleanness and death. Then he made the long, difficult journey through suffering and rejection and blood to death on a cross. Then when Jesus cried from the cross, ***“It is finished”*** (John 19:30), he declared us free by his blood poured out for sin once for all. No wonder we praise him!

Jesus did all this not because you happened to do something that gained some favor. Not because he knew you were going to be such a faithful follower. Not because of anything you have done, thought, or said, or didn't do. Jesus did all this because ***“[he] loves us...”*** with an undeserved, self-sacrificing, focused-on-you love that brought him here in the first place.

Now out of love for you and by the blood he shed for you, he ***“made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father...”*** Paul explained to the Ephesians (2:6), ***“God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms...”*** Heaven is already yours and mine through Christ our King. In view of his undying mercy, we offer ourselves, our lives, our gifts, our all as ***“living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God”*** (Romans 12:1) to bring him glory for that amazing love and mercy.

So you already know how to identify Christ the King. You know who he is and you'll know him because of what he has done. Surely you'll know him by the nail marks in his hands and feet, but could you miss him on that Last Day? That sometimes happens in the airport or a crowded place when you need to meet someone, but John makes it very clear that ***you will not miss him***. He takes us to that Last Day. ***“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.”*** Yes, ***“every eye will see him”***, even Jesus' enemies, whether those who opposed him in the past or those who oppose him and his Word and his people now. For them it will be a day of terror, as they find out they were wrong to reject Christ. They will spend eternity regretting that fact, for ***“at the name of Jesus every knee [will] bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*** (Philippians 2:10-11) Even they who rejected him will acknowledge Christ as King. I pray that none of us will be among their number.

...But will the Last Day be terrifying for believers like you and me? ***“Every eye will see him”***, especially his people. Last week, we heard how Christ was coming again to bring his people, living and dead, to be with him in heaven forever. For those washed clean in the blood of the Lamb, the Last Day will be a day of great joy because ***“we will be with the Lord forever”*** (1 Thessalonians 4:17). You won't miss Jesus. No, you will personally spend eternity with him.

You'll know him when you see him, but he's not here yet. Another church year comes to a close. Our eyes lift heavenward with longing for the return of the King. Over the centuries, the Church has sung countless songs expressing that longing. One in particular beautifully expresses the words of our text with all its glory and longing. It was written by a Lutheran composer who recently joined his Savior in the glories of heaven. ***“Peace be to you and grace from Him who freed us from our sin, who loved us all, and shed his blood that we might saved be. Sing holy, holy to our Lord, the Lord almighty God who was and is, and is to come sing holy, holy Lord. Rejoice in heaven, all ye that dwell therein, rejoice on earth, ye saints below for Christ is coming, is coming soon, for Christ is coming soon. E'en so Lord Jesus, quickly come and night shall be no more. They need no light, no lamp, nor sun for Christ will be their all!”*** To Christ the King be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.