

A reading from Revelation one through eight, the revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made known by sending His Angels to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw. That is the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it because the time is near, John, to the seven churches in the province of Grace and peace to you, from him who is, 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 first born 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 a priest to serve his God and Father. To him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen. Look, he is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him. Even those who pierced him and all Peoples on 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, the Word of the Lord A reading from John 20:19 through 31 we please stand for the reading of the Gospel. Jesus appears to his disciples on the evening of that first day of the week when the disciples were together with the doors locked for the fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you. After he said this, he showed them his hands and his sides. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord again, Jesus said, Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And with that he breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven. And if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. Now, Thomas, one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, we have seen the Lord. But he said to them, Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my fingers where the nails were and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.

A week later, his disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you. Then he said to Thomas, Put your finger here. See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it to my side. Stop doubting and believe. Thomas said to him, My Lord, my God. Then Jesus told him, Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name, the word of the Lord.

Thanks to your God. Would you pray with me? Heavenly Father, we ask that you would bless our children as they go to kids alive. That faith, which sometimes comes so easily for children, would also be present among us, that we would have a childlike faith, believing that you have risen from the dead, that you are alive, and that you are calling us to live in your Kingdom and through your power, by your Holy Spirit. So now bless these words as they're preached that they might be for us, the very words of God in Jesus name. Amen. Please be seated. And kids, you can go off to kids alive right now. Have fun. Make sure you stay clear of any Ant Hills, although we think we've killed most of them. All right. So a lot of times when people are asked, what do you want for your children? What do you want for them when they grow up? What do you want them to be? And often times the answer that people give is, Well, I really don't care. I just want them to be happy. I want them to be happy. Does God want us to be happy?

Does he want us to be happy? It's kind of an interesting question. I remember hearing a preacher once saying, It's a dangerous thing to believe that God wants you to be happy. For he said he has had many people come into his office and say, I want to divorce my spouse. And he says to them, Why do you want to divorce your spouse? I'm miserable, I'm unhappy. My spouse does not make me happy. And after all, doesn't God want me to be happy? To which he would say, no, God wants you to be good. And he would say that in the old days, people what they wanted for their children was for them to be good, not so much to be happy. And yet it's a valid question. Does God want us to be happy? As we come into this Easter season, we're going to be walking through the Book of Revelation. We'll be touching on certain chapters, but in various places at different times. There's a thing that's said in Revelation, Blessed is and then a sentence that follows, Blessed is the one who believes. Blessed is the one who receives. Blessed is the one who overcomes that word.

Blessed is the same word that Jesus used in the Sermon on the Mount, and it can also be translated, happy, happy, happy. One of the chief themes and aims of the Book of Revelation is the happiness of God's people, the blessedness of God's people. But the happiness that God gives is so often different than the happiness of the world. I get happy when I eat ice cream. Anybody with me, right, we get happy when someone we love says, I love you. People get happy when they buy a new car. There are all kinds of different things and situations, a new job, whatever it might be, that for the moment make us happy. But of course, we know that the happiness of God is deeper and the happiness he desires for his people is something that really jibes with the word blessed, that puts the people of God, if they really are in God, in an enviable position. Not that we want people to envy us, unless that envy moves them towards the happiness of God. So John writes the revelation from Jesus Christ in Revelation One, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.

That word Revelation is the word apocalypse. Now, if somebody says the apocalypse is upon us, do you think that's happy news? No. They tend to say that when disasters are happening, and that's because in the Book of Revelation, there's all kinds of imagery of the things that go on in this world, the disasters, the murders, all the unholy stuff that happens. But that's not what apocalypse means. Apocalypse means revealing it is the making clear of something. So God makes clear to his servants through the revelation from Jesus Christ what must soon take place. So if somebody asks you, is the Book of Revelation about something that happens in the distant future? You can say, well, for the people of the time that it was written to, it was said, this is something that must soon take place. This is something that God is revealing to them now for their happiness, for their fortification, for their ability to stand in the days of trouble. For John was writing this as persecutions were beginning to ramp up in the Empire of Rome, they would get worse and worse from this point on to the point where Christians would be thrown to the Lions, where they would be martyred and the Church would be built on the blood of the martyrs.

So God is preparing them, he's fortifying them. He's saying, there's a happiness you can have in the midst of these troubled days. And indeed, John is writing from the Isle of Paphos, where he is in exile, already suffering for their faith. And yet he's saying, there's a happiness, folks, there's a depth in God that he wants to make known to you. So he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies everything he saw. That is the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. And he says, this blessed or happy is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy. So today that's Lily, Lily, you read the words of this prophecy aloud. You are blessed, you are happy and blessed are those who hear it. And that's you and me praise God, we are happy and blessed to have heard this word, but blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it because the time is near. Is that you, is that me? We be among those who take it to heart, that is, who take it in, who dwell on it, who savor it, who allow it to enter into our lives and shape our days and shape how we live and how we love and how we move and have our being.

Blessed are those who hear it and take it to heart what is written in it, because the time is near, that word. Time is the word Kairos, which talks about the opportunities that are before us. When the Scriptures say, make the most of every opportunity for the days or evil, it's an encouragement to the people of God to grab onto the goodness, the solidness, the happiness of God in this time. This is our opportunity in this day where you and I live, right in our neighborhoods, in this country of America, in this time of political division, happiness and blessedness of the Lord is ours and ours to share. How do we get it? John actually kind of shows us three ways that this happiness becomes ours. He writes, John to the seven churches in the province of Asia. Now, there are actually more churches in the province of Asia than that. At that time, there were about ten John is the Apostle John. There's some argument about that among scholars, but the early Church fathers all believed that these were the words of the Apostle John. And if it was good enough for them, it's good enough for me.

So John's writing to the existing seven churches, really ten churches at the time, but he chooses the number seven, which is a very important number in the book of Revelation. It's a number of wholeness and fullness. And so symbolically, this is a word that is not just for the seven churches, but for all the Church 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 first

born from the dead and the ruler of the Kings of the Earth. The first key to happiness that John shows us is that happiness can only be found in the fullness of God. Happiness can only be found in the fullness of God. And what he presents to us here is the Triune God. God in all his fullness. God is the One, the Father, who is, who was and is to come. Does life ever feel unstable for you? It sure does for me at times. But God is and was and is to come. Nothing is unstable for him. He's the same yesterday, today and forever.

This is our God, our Father that John says our happiness comes from. Then he says Greetings from the seven spirits before his throne. And people get all tripped on this, up on this because there's seven lampstands in Revelation. There are seven churches, there are seven Angels, seven messengers. And they say, what is the seven spirits? We know about the Spirit of God, but this is a Trinitarian greeting he's giving us. Father, Spirit and Son, kind of in a different order than normal. Father, Spirit and Son. The seven spirits stand for the Spirit of God in all his fullness. Remember that number seven means the fullness of God and the perfection of God. It may relate to Isaiah, chapter eleven, verse two, where there's a sevenfold revealing of the Spirit. It says, this is the Spirit who would be on the Messiah. So this is a prophecy. And it says, the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of might, the spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord, the sevenfold Spirit who opens up our hearts to everything that is good and right and Holy and wise and true about the living God and about his Messiah.

So Greetings to you from him for your happiness. Your happiness resides in the Spirit of God and truly nowhere else. The seven spirits before his throne and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the first born from the dead and the ruler of the Kings of the Earth. And so here John describes Jesus in three ways, borrowing from Psalm 89, verse 27 and 37 where it says, I will appoint the Messiah to be my first born, the most exalted of the Kings of the Earth. He will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky that Jesus is the true and faithful witness, the one who came to point us towards the Father, that he is the first born from the dead. So as we have celebrated Easter, we have this unbelievable confidence, unbelievable confidence that we too will rise from the dead, that we can we can comfort one another with the fact that this life is not all there is, but this life is the beginning of life eternal. We can rejoice with Jolie as she has grieved over the loss of her father this past week and she can hold on to the joy that her father knows the Lord and is with the Lord.

And he has followed the first born from the dead. And one day all our bodies will be resurrected and we will follow him as well. That's where our happiness resides. And he is the ruler of the Kings of the Earth. Man looking around at the Kings of the Earth and how they mess things up, one day all kingdoms will be destroyed. The scriptures tell us that that even means the Kingdom of America, folks, all kingdoms, all rules, all authorities, will bow before the Lord and he will set everything right. That's where our happiness resides in that King. But our happiness is also found not only in the fullness of God. It's found in the blessings that only come from God, the blessings that only come from Him 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 serve as God and Father to Him. Be glory and power forever and ever. Amen. What comes from our God love when you and I are without love? We're never without love, because our God and Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, is shedding his love on us every day.

That Jesus Christ loved us so much that he went to the cross for our sake, that you and I are profoundly loved to the depths of our being. That's where our happiness resides and that we have been freed from our sins by his blood. That the blood of Jesus Christ literally cleanses us. Do any of you ever feel unclean, man, there are times I feel so unclean. But then the Spirit reminds me, you are clean because of my word and the blood shed for you. I have washed you. You will never be more pure than you are now before in the eyes of my Father. And you are free. The world is not free from sin. Everything the world does is tainted by sin and therefore serves the purposes of sin. But you and I have been freed from our sins. It doesn't mean we don't sin. It doesn't mean that we don't serve God with mixed motives, that the taint of sin isn't still all around us. And yet at our heart and in our soul, we are totally freed from the effects, the curse, the condemnation of sin. And therefore, we're free not to sin as well.

We are free for the righteousness of God and to devote our lives to his will and his purposes. That's where our happiness resides. And he has made us to be a Kingdom and priest to serve His God and Father. That there is a Kingdom coming, but it is now here as well. There is a Kingdom that is and was and is to come, in essence, that is already and not yet, and that we're experiencing even as we gather here to worship the Lord. Do you know the Kingdom is here and you know the purposes of the Kingdom? Is it's for you and me to live as Princes and princesses in the Kingdom of God? Not in the sense that we're to be haughty and expect everybody to serve us and bow down to us, but rather that is true nobility. We seek the good of our Kingdom. We seek to spread the good news of that Kingdom. We seek to spread the justice and the influence and the power and the Grace and the love of that Kingdom. Are you living in that Kingdom now? Are you living for that Kingdom now? That's where your happiness is.

It's not in your stuff. Your happiness is in him and his Kingdom. So that we would get that right. Right Church. So John concludes, look, he's coming with the gods, and every eye will see him. Even those who Pierce him. And all Peoples on Earth will mourn because of him. Why? Because happiness is only known in the Kingdom of God and all the Peoples, which is actually more effectively translated, all the tribes, in essence, all the mini kingdoms will mourn. Why will they mourn? Because they were serving their Kingdom and not the Kingdom of heaven. They will see that their Kingdom was actually set up and opposed to the Kingdom of heaven. They will see that it was their Kingdom that brought about the crucifixion of the King. And so you and I, I believe we've already shed tears over that. But I believe on that day our tears will be more profound. I don't quite know how to describe it, but there is a beauty. When Christ and all he has done is revealed. Christ on the cross, his blood poured out for you and for me. And we probably only grasp it this much.

And every now and then in our lives, we grasp it just a little bit more. And usually what comes is tears and profound joy. Oh, my God, I'm more sinful than I could ever imagine, but you are more glorious and more merciful than I could have ever dared to hope. And on that day, we will see Jesus face to face. I'm going to cry. I don't know about you. I will weep over what my sins did to my King. But in that is my happiness, for my King has forgiven me and loves me and has called me into his Kingdom. That's what he wants for his people on that day. That's what he wants for his people today, for that's where our happiness resides. So here it is. I'd love for you to remember this. Happiness is proportional. I want you to say that with me, happiness is proportional. And here's what I mean by that. I was over at Tanner Griffith's House the other day, and many of you know, I'm also an artist. I love to do art, and it makes me happy. When I hear of schools that have good art program, it makes me happy.

My happiness is proportional to my investment in art. There are people who don't give a rip about art, and they could care less if the schools have art programs. And so the idea that a school has an art program doesn't make them that happy. But if they're an artist or have an appreciation for their arts by proportion, their happiness rises when they hear of a good program. Well, Tanner was gathering people because they're going to be planting a Church and he said either me or my wife are going to have to Scoot out early because we just found out today that our daughter in her arts program is getting an award tonight and one of us needs to be there for that award. Happiness is proportional. Their happiness over her art is even more than my happiness. They showed me the picture of it. It was beautiful. It made me happy. But their happiness is more and perhaps their daughter Archer perhaps her happiness was the most for she made the piece of art she was invested in it happiness, folks, is proportional the Lord wants us to know that that you will never regret stepping into the happiness of God stepping into living for his Kingdom investing your lives and your time and your resources into the honor and the glory that's due his name.

That's what takes place when we gather. That's what takes place when we go out to love and serve the Lord. Thanks be to God Hallelujah Hallelujah that's the happiness he wants for his people. Will you receive it? Heavenly Father, would you make us a supremely happy people? Give us a happiness that doesn't change with the temperature that doesn't change with the circumstances but a happiness that is rooted in father, son and Holy spirit. Happiness that is rooted in your Kingdom, Lord happiness that is found at this table where we remember what our precious Lord Jesus has done for us. We love you, Lord and we thank you that you want us to be happy in Jesus name. Amen, man.

