

A Bible Bullet (aimed at the heart)

Feast of Christ the King, Cycle B

Daniel 7:13-14; Revelation 1:5-8; John 18:33-37

As we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King, we are reminded that the season of Advent follows. Our readings for this week center on the theme of the Kingship and Kingdom of Jesus. In the style of apocalyptic writing, the reading in Daniel relates a vision experienced by the writer. Last week's study introduced us to this style.

In addition to Daniel, the Book of Revelation is also apocalyptic in style. This causes much misunderstanding of Revelation and instills fear in many readers. As with other apocalyptic selections, this must be read with an understanding of the symbolism which was familiar to the readers of the era of its writing. Let's back up one verse and examine the message.

To the seven churches in the province of Asia: John wishes you grace and peace--from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne,

In the New Testament, Asia always means the Roman province, not the continent. The seven Churches are named a few verses later but must not be considered to be limited to only those seven. John, who had the background of a Jew, had an affinity for the number seven which was believed to be the complete number. William Barclay recounts that John uses the number seven fifty-four times in Revelation. He writes of seven candlesticks, seven stars, seven lamps, seven seals, seven horns and seven eyes, seven thunders, seven angels, plagues and bowls. Since seven stands for completeness, then writing to seven churches would mean to the whole Church to John.

The reference to who is, who was and who is to come takes us back to Moses' story at the burning bush when God said to tell the people that I AM sent him. It is a common term of reference for the eternal, all-powerful God. The Greeks of this era spoke of Zeus the same way. The term is again found in Hebrews 13 where it is written, "Jesus is the same yesterday, today and for ever."

The image of the seven spirits before the throne of God may mean that God shares his presence equally with all people. No Christian brotherhood is left devoid of God's presence, so the spirit of all churches would stand for the presence of God in all churches.

and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born from the dead and

ruler of the kings of earth..

Here we are reminded that Jesus witnesses God to us for he has first-hand knowledge of God. He is the king of the dead as much as king of the living because there can be no part of our universe over which he does not rule. All things are given to him by God. To call Jesus the ruler of the kings of the earth is to call him the anointed One, Messiah.

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his own blood,

We are set free from our sins at the cost of the blood, at the cost of the life of Jesus. Note that “loves” is present tense and “freed” is past tense. His love is always there in the present, but it was expressed in one past complete act, his death on the cross.

who has made us a royal nation of priests in the service of his God and Father--to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen!

Being made priests we have access to God. In the world of the Jew, only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and then only once a year on the highest of holy days, the Day of Atonement. But we have constant access to God through Jesus who has made us children of God in the royal line and through Jesus who has opened the presence of God to all.

See, he comes amid the clouds! Every eye shall see him, even of those who pierced him. All the peoples of the earth shall lament him bitterly. So it is to be! Amen!

This is a message of both hope and warning. Those who were currently suffering the persecution of Christians found a promise of justice and salvation. Those who stood in opposition to God’s kingdom were being warned of certain punishment.

The Lord says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the One who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

This takes us back to an image found at the beginning of the section “I AM WHO AM”, Jesus, God, Yahweh, Alpha and Omega, **King of Kings**.