

CHRIST THE KING

Revelation 1:4-8

All for want of a nail

Most attribute the poem to Ben Franklin, who included it in his almanac, but some claim it is much older: “For want of a nail the shoe was lost. For want of a shoe the horse was lost. For want of a horse the rider was lost. For want of a rider the battle was lost. For want of a battle the kingdom was lost. And all for want of a nail.” But no nail was wanting in the kingdom of Christ. There were plenty of nails, and the King who wanted by them to save His kingdom found them just fine.

“*Grace and peace,*” St John bids us. Grace is God’s undeserved love; peace is the result of the forgiveness of sins won by that love. “*Grace and peace*” from whom? “*From Him who is and was and is to come,*” “*from the seven spirits,*” or rather, “*the sevenfold Spirit,*” as the Holy Spirit is described in Isaiah 11:2, and “*from Jesus Christ*”—all three connected with a “*from.*” In other words, “*Grace and peace from Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*” And where else would we expect to find it than in that very name in which we live, gather, and hope?

“*Grace and peace from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.*” The Revelation of St. John is soaked with triads, as those of you who took the class might remember. Here’s our third already. The first was “*Him who is and was and is to come.*” The second was Father, Holy Ghost, and Son. And now the third, an expansion of the second, is the description of our Savior as “*the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.*” His death is proclaimed; He is the faithful witness, or martyr. His resurrection is proclaimed; He is the firstborn of the dead. His ascension is proclaimed; He is the ruler of kings on earth. Talk about a greeting. This hello is a sermon.

Notice that Christ, now enthroned in heaven, is forever what He has done. He is dying. He is living. He is ruling. There is no Jesus but the Jesus whose person and work is taken and proclaimed as a whole: Virgin womb, manger, wilderness, upper room, garden, courtroom, cross, empty tomb, Mount of Olives, and all. We don’t move on from one event to the other; we exist, with Christ, within and throughout them all.

Having said hello, St. John now wants to rejoice in praise with his brethren with, wouldn’t you know, another triad. When St. John packs, he packs. Lifetimes wouldn’t be enough to unpack all the wonder in these words, but let’s at least scrape the surface. Who is Christ? He is “*Him who loves us.*” How do we know He loves us? Because He “*has freed us from our sins by His blood.*” Why? To “*ma[k]e us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father.*” A King needs a kingdom. Jesus is true man, as we are priests to His God, and true God, as we are priests to His Father. Three persons in one God; two natures in one person. St. John’s math is terrible, but His theology shines like the Sun of Righteousness, and since when does God have to fit into some human equation anyways?

And St. John just keeps going. *“O Lord, open my lips,”* we pray as we begin Matins and Vespers. The thing is, once the Lord opens a Christian’s mouth, after filling his ear with Christ, it’s hard to close it again. Like the tomb that once held our Lord, His priests’ mouths remain forever open, declaring the glory of the Lamb of God. You guessed it, another triad. What is Jesus’ doing? *“He is coming with the clouds.”* Who will see Him? *“And every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him.”* And what will their response be? *“And all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of Him.”*

There is no kingdom without the nails, and our pierced Jesus will descend just as He ascended: bodily, and with the clouds. And, while only a few witnessed His ascension, no one will miss His return. Those who have usurped Christ’s rule in their life by spurning His promises and neglecting His will will wail as a man wails on His way to the gallows, as His cost of his crime sinks in at long last. Those who love Christ will weep at the reminder of His Passion they find in His wounds, for they will see in them the depths of His love which endured so much for their own sins.

Does your brain hurt yet? Mine does. But there is just a little more to cram in yet. The Lord God has something to say, *“I am the Alpha and the Omega who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”* I guess Jesus likes triads too. The disciple doesn’t fall far from the teacher. *“Wait a minute, Pastor. You said Jesus. The text says the Lord God is speaking.”* Yup, the Lord God is talking, and the Lord God is Jesus. Jesus is the One *“who is and who was and who is to come.”* I know, I know, you thought that was the Father, and it is, but I warned you. Just as the Father is God, so is Jesus, no matter how many Jehovah’s Witnesses come to your door. So, let’s stop trying to make sense of the mysterious and get back to that triad.

Jesus is *“the Alpha and the Omega.”* As seminarians and frat brothers know, alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and omega the last. Jesus is the first and the last. While He took flesh at His conception, His divinity was never conceived, but, rather begotten of the Father from eternity. Jesus is *“the Almighty,”* having all might, which He uses to rule all things for our good.

“For want of a nail the shoe was lost. For want of a shoe the horse was lost. For want of a horse the rider was lost. For want of a rider the battle was lost. For want of a battle the kingdom was lost. And all for want of a nail.” But no nail was wanting in the the kingdom of Christ. There were plenty of nails, and the King who wanted by them to save His kingdom found them just fine. The battle’s won. Let God then shut our lips to gossip and coarse language, lying and careless words and open them to speak forth His glory and dominion. Let Jesus, who has freed us by His blood, now set us free to offer ourselves as living sacrifices in all things, even the seemingly little things, to Him who offered Himself for us, for, when the little things are neglected, the big things tend to go awry. Just ask that king whose kingdom was lost for a nail. The little things can make the biggest difference, especially when done for the One you love. Just look at the holes in your King’s hands if you need proof. *“To Him who loves us and has freed*

us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” And Amen.