

***Revelation 1:4b-8.***

***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, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn 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, <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”***

**Let us live in the peace of Christ the King as we testify to his grace**

- 1. His enduring grace and power gives us peace.***
- 2. The blood of Christ has set us free***

*“This feeling of freedom. This feeling of liberation. There is nothing like when you know that you are a child of God and that you are not a slave.”* These are words of Majed Shafie given in an interview that was recently aired on Christian Broadcasting Network.<sup>1</sup> Majed is a man who was born into a prominent Egyptian Muslim family, but after struggling with the Muslim faith through much of his childhood and then meeting some Christian friends in college he converted to Christianity. Majed felt so strongly about his new faith that he helped coordinate underground efforts to share the gospel of Jesus despite a government that operated under strict sharia law, which is exceedingly unkind and horrifically hostile to those who leave the Muslim religion. Majed was arrested because of his involvement with Christianity and these underground ministries. Majid was thrown into a dark prison cell, and then was beaten within an inch of his life as the authorities looked to extract more information including the names and locations of other Christians.

Majed prayed that the LORD would take his life so that he would not give up the names of his friends. And yet in a series of extraordinary events the LORD strengthened Majed in this time of trial, preserved Majed's life, and God even saw to it that Majed was delivered from his captors. God had blessed Majed with a faith that was so strong that Majed was willing to give his life for Jesus because this man had come to know the good news of the cross. Jesus had paid for his sins. Jesus had laid down his life for him. He had made that sacrifice to save us all. And so Majed knew that no matter what happened to him he was saved because of God's exceeding love and kindness in Christ Jesus. His Lord and Savior

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<sup>1</sup> Here is the link to the video. It is a longer newscast from CBN (Christian Broadcasting Network). The article I am suggesting to you begins at 9:00 (nine minutes) in the broadcast.  
<http://www1.cbn.com/video/cbn-newswatch/2015/11/20/newswatch-november-20-2015>

Jesus Christ made the ultimate sacrifice. Jesus had brought forgiveness. The message of the gospel of Jesus had set Majed free from guilt and sin, and set him free to serve his LORD and Savior, Jesus Christ.

It is an extraordinary story. It is one that begs to be shared especially in a time like this. It can be frightening to consider what is going on the world today. It can be truly frightening to consider the violent opposition that Christianity is facing around the globe. It can be shocking and unsettling that Christianity is opposed not only by a few individuals, but by entire governments, hostile countries, and terrorist organizations. Such accounts of horrific opposition may lead us to doubt the fact that God is in control of all things and that Jesus is King and ruler of all nations. But we are reminded, by current events, past events, and by God's sacred scriptures that our God is in control. He always has been, he is now, and always will be the Almighty God who rules over all things for the good of his Church. This assurance of God's eternal love produces peace and confidence in the hearts of his people, and **so let us live in the peace of Christ the King as we testify to his grace.** Because as members of his kingdom, as those who believe and serve our Lord Jesus, **we know that his enduring grace and power gives us peace, and we know that the blood of Christ has set us free from sin and free for service to God.**

The words of our text today are found in the very beginning of the book of Revelation. As John prepares to detail the contents of his alarming visions, as he prepares to tell the Christians of his day the many things that would go badly in such a sinful world, as he prepares to give his account of the end times and the end of all things, John prepares his listeners with this simple and powerful greeting. ***Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come.*** Grace and peace to you. God's undeserved love for sinners in sending us a Savior in Jesus Christ produces peace in our hearts no matter what the world around us looks like. We know that God loves us and cares for us because he gave himself for us. He paid for all our sins. He died on the cross, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven to once again take up full use of his glory and power. He tells us this in his Word so that we might know of his extraordinary love and kindness, and that grace of God in Jesus our King gives us peace.

In this greeting John also speaks of our LORD's eternal qualities so that we might consider our LORD's steadfast love and find peace not only in the depth of his great love for us but in the enduring length of his love. His love is steadfast. God's love for you is reliable and eternal. No matter the situation, no matter the decade, the century, the millennium God has shown his enduring love for his people.

***Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come.*** God is eternal. He has no beginning. He has no end. And therefore his qualities of love and grace and power endure forever and are constant and consistent. The God who is watching over all things in these modern times is the same God that was watching over his people in ancient times. The God who sent out his Spirit to bring his people to faith and who sent out his Son to give people forgiveness and life is the same yesterday, today, and forever. ***"I am***

***the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”***

There is a certain peace in knowing that when the Philistines mocked and the ancient Egyptians enslaved God’s people the LORD looked down with compassion upon his chosen nation and delivered them. He protected, rescued, and delivered his beloved children. There is peace in knowing that when the Assyrians and the Babylonians exiled the people of Israel and Judah God looked down with his steadfast love and sent his word with them, preserved a remnant of faithful believers (sometimes in extraordinary ways, the three men in the fiery furnace, Daniel in the lion’s den) and brought them back the promised land so that the Savior could be born just as God had promised his people.

God had been with his people from the beginning. He was with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was with Adam and Eve when he gave them the very first promise of the Savior. God is with his people and he cares for his people. When those who received these words of John’s revelation would be persecuted by both Jewish leaders who hated Jesus and the Roman government that was out to crush this new religion, God’s people had this assurance, God would be with them. He would care for them. He would rescue them from the madness and hate of Rome’s emperors and he would deliver them from the hatred and scorn of the Jewish leaders and many Jewish people.

As we read these words today we have that same kind of assurance. The eternal God of steadfast love, the one who strengthened David as he stood before Goliath, the God who closed the mouths of the lions who surrounded Daniel, the same God who strengthened the first Christian martyr Stephen and blessed him with a faith that endured through death and into eternity; that is our same God. He will care for us. He will protect us. He will deliver us from evil. And in the ultimate deliverance from evil he will bring his people to our heavenly home. He has so in the past. We have seen that enduring love on display in his word, we have seen our God rescue and preserve and even strengthen his church in the midst of similar opposition throughout the pages of history. God even used the rise of the Mohammedans during Luther’s time as a factor that accelerated the Reformation and thus once again uncovered the truths of Scripture for the healing and salvation of many souls.

Yes, our gracious God is in control of all nations, and the width and the depth, as well as the length, of our God’s extraordinary grace creates a peace, a tranquility, a calm, in the hearts of believers today. And so today, when an American atheists mock and when Belgium terrorists carry out their violent plots, God is there with his grace which results in peace. When foreign governments conspire and when unstable individuals hunt down Christians on our very own soil, God is there with his grace that results in peace. The one who has always been there for his people to strengthen, preserve, and deliver his people from evil will be there for his people today and always, in this place and throughout the nations with his grace.

And remember it is this aspect of God, that very grace of God, of which Majed Shafie spoke so passionately about. In his interview he reserved his most passionate words for the

grace of God. Yes, God had delivered and rescued him from physical suffering and death, but his voice swelled when he said those words that we began our mediation for today. ***“This feeling of freedom. This feeling of liberation. There is nothing like when you know that you are a child of God and that you are not a slave.”*** Rather than a mere physical focus, these words have a deeply spiritual focus. With great appreciation for the good news of Jesus Majed spoke of the forgiveness and sacrifice of Christ that is so amazing. And so when he speaks of freedom and liberation in these words he is speaking about the freedom from sin and guilt and from condemnation. He speaks of spiritual freedom, of eternal freedom, and certainly the apostle John speaks to that here as well in these words from Revelation. ***To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.*** These words speak of unloosening, a letting go. Our Savior has freed us from our sins by his blood. The blood of Christ was shed for us so that guilt of sin that hung around our necks like a heavy weight was untied and let go. Like a heavy rope tied around your hands, like a rope that is to bound to enslave to sin and guilt and death, that cord is cut, the rope is untied from your hands and that weight is released from your neck and you are not only set free from that horrible slavery but you are set free for a wonderful purpose, to live for your God. Suddenly you can breathe and you are filled with life and are able to do what God created you to do. Live for God with meaning and purpose. This is the grace that God has given us. This is the freedom that the believer can speak of: We have been freed from our sin by his blood.

Christ Jesus went to the cross to pay for my sins and yours. The king of glory humbled himself to take on our punishment, he set us free from guilt, from shame. He set us free from hell and from slavery to sin. And in his great love he has set us free for a special purpose. Our Lord 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.*** God has set us free from sin and set us free for service a member of his kingdom and priests in service to God. We are to live lives that testify of his love, that bear witness to his grace, that proclaim his deeds of love. And we learn about how to do this from the one described here as the ***faithful witness.*** As we serve our King Jesus we serve the one who set us free, we serve the one who in his great compassion served us and saved us, we serve the one who forgave us; and so we too will live of service, we will be compassionate and forgiving, gracious and kind. Let us testify of his glory and power, his love and kindness as we live our lives in service to our King. And all the while we will live in peace knowing that the same one who has forgiven us in the one who in love rules over all things with his Almighty power. Jesus, the ruler of the kings of the earth, is your Savior and mine. He has set us free from personal anguish as he has set us free from the weight of sin, and Jesus has set us free from any global anxiety because he rules over all things for the good of his Church until he comes again in glory to set things straight for all eternity. In faith we proclaim, ***So shall it be!***

The grace of God produces peace in the hearts and lives of his people. Let us live in the peace of Christ our King as we testify to his grace, until that day when he comes again in glory! Amen.