

Pastor Don Nelson

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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“GLORY AND POWER”**

**Revelation 1:5b-7**

*O God, where is your glory?*

Where is your glory when this world is awash in immorality and injustice and idolatry?

Where is your glory when your faithful ones are the have-nots, the voiceless, the last and the least?

Where is your glory when Christian discipleship is all struggle, and little or no (palpable) reward?

*O God, where is your power?*

Where is your power when earthly powers use religion to manipulate and control the people?

Where is your power when the greedy and the ruthless pull the strings and call the shots?

Where is your power when the wicked abuse the weak and the righteous with (apparent) impunity?

Where is God’s glory? Where is God’s power? For many of us these questions well up from places of hardship, disappointment, brokenness, and longing.

O God, where is your glory? Where is your power? First century Christ Followers asked the same questions, sometimes with great urgency.

- Please turn to Revelation 1:1-2: This is **“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God”** the Father **“gave him to show his servants... He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John.”** The apostle John functions as the reporter, but the real author of this book is the Living God.

- Like the rest of Scripture this book was written *for us*, but not *to us*. John identifies the original recipients in verse 4: **“To the seven churches in the province of Asia,”** the roman province that includes the western quarter of what will become Turkey.

These **“seven churches”** are located in seven cities: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. As close together as these congregations are on the map, they are worlds apart socially, economically, politically, and spiritually. Yet they all have this in common: their loyalty to Jesus, the Lord of the Church, is at risk.

Two of the seven {Smyrna, 2:8-11; Philadelphia, 3:7-13} are subject to exceptional hostility by Jewish neighbors.

Two of the seven {Smyrna, 2:8-11; Pergamum, 2:12-17} are being severely persecuted and even martyred by the local government.

One church {Philadelphia, 3:7-13} is small, weak and poor. Another {Smyrna, 2:8-11} is utterly destitute.

One of the churches {Ephesus, 2:1-7} has lost its love for God and each other.

TWO {Pergamum, 2:12-17; Thyatira, 2:18-29} are tolerating immorality and idolatry in their midst.

One of the seven {Laodicea, 3:14-22} is exceptionally wealthy, socially comfortable, spiritually blind and fruitless, while another {Sardis, 3:1-6} is large, affluent, busy – and spiritually dead.

Some of the threats are external; others are internal. Some are obvious; others are subtle. Regardless, every church is either in danger of

betraying Christ or it has already done so. So in chs 2 and 3 he speaks to each, directly commending their virtues, condemning their vices, and calling them to faithfulness.

But these brothers and sisters also need a fresh and clearer vision of God's glory and power.

When pride chips away at our commitment, a vision of God's glory and power humbles us.

When material poverty damages our faith, a vision of God's glory and power enables us to trust.

When social pressure undercuts our devotion, a vision of God's glory and power gives us a backbone.

When immorality corrodes our dedication, a vision of God's glory and power helps us stand firm.

When complacency undermines allegiance, a vision of God's glory and power helps us rely on him.

When visceral fear threatens our allegiance, a vision of God's glory and power fortifies our courage.

When material wealth corrupts our loyalty, a vision of God's glory and power purifies our hearts.

☐ Our great God gives such a vision in today's text. Let us turn back to 1:5b-7:

**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 forever and ever! Amen.**

**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.**

✎ **“To him who loves us”**: God reveals his glory and power, 1<sup>st</sup>, through Christ's αγαπη love.

☼ God's αγαπη is freely given regardless of our worth. He **“demonstrates [it] in this:”** (Romans 5:8) **“While we were still sinners”** – and thus {Col 1:21} **“alienated from God and enemies”** to him in our **“minds”** – even then **“Christ died for”** our sake.

☼ God's αγαπη is indomitable. {Ro 8:38-39} **“Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

☼ And God's αγαπη is transformative. Romans 8:28-29: **“in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers”** and sisters. God loves us so well he accepts us just as we are, but too well to leave us that way. He redeems every hardship and loss to recreate us in the likeness of Christ Jesus.

This is the glory and power of God, that he loves even us and changes us to become like Christ.

✎ **“To him who...has freed us from our sins by his blood”**: God reveals his glory and power, 2<sup>nd</sup>, through Christ's ministry of liberation.

☼ {Eph 1:7} **“In [Jesus] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.”** The Lord has liberated us from the guilt of sin.

☼ Not only so, Romans 6:6 {NLT}: **“Our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin.”** Apart from Christ the sinful self is our Master, but in Christ, we are empowered to do God’s will. He has liberated us from the power of sin.

☼ That is not all! {Ro 6:23} **“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.”** If we have been **“united with him ...in his death”** (by casting ourselves upon his mercy), then **“we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection”** (Romans 6:5). The Lord has liberated us from the eternal consequences of sin.

This is the glory and power of God, that he liberates us.

✎ **“To him who...has made us to be a kingdom and priests”:** God reveals his glory and power, 3<sup>rd</sup>, through Christ’s creation of a new people.

☼ The essence of our kingdom living is practical submission to the reign of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is hallowing his great Name and doing his perfect will {Mt 6:10} **“on earth as it is heaven.”** It is {Mt 22:37, 39} **“[loving] the Lord [our] God with all [our] heart and with all [our] soul and with all [our] mind,”** and **“[loving our neighbors] as [ourselves].”** It is {Mic 6:8} **“[acting] justly, [prizing] mercy, and [walking] humbly with [our] God.”** It is being **“poor in spirit,”** mourning the things that break God’s heart, being **“meek,”** **“[hungering] and [thirsting] for**

**righteousness,”** being **“merciful”** to the undeserving, being **“pure in heart,”** being **“peacemakers,”** and pursuing righteousness even at the cost of persecution.

☼ The essence of our priestly calling is to {Jn 4:23} **“worship [Holy God] in spirit and in truth,”** to do the ministry of reconciliation by imploring our neighbors {2 Co 5:20} **“on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God,”** to fulfill our Great Commission to {Mt 28:19-20} **“go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing...and... teaching them to obey everything [Jesus]... commanded,”** and to {Heb 4:16} confidently **“approach the throne of grace with”** petitions for ourselves and intercessions for others, **“so that we may receive mercy and find grace.”**

This is the glory and power of God, that he has made us to be a kingdom and priests.

✎ **“Look, he is coming”:** 4<sup>th</sup>, God will someday reveal his glory and power through Christ’s Second Coming.

☼ Philippians 2:5-11: Christ Jesus shares equality with God the Father. Yet he emptied himself, became a human being, took on the nature of a servant, and became obedient even to the point of dying on a cross!

**Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should 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.**

The world does not yet acknowledge his exaltation. But when he returns as the {Rev 19:16} **“King of kings and Lord of lords”** they will. His majesty and might will be undeniable.

This is the glory and power of God, that Christ will return.

Take heart! God will prevail over sin, death and the devil. Even now he is revealing his great glory and power through Christ’s love, Christ’s ministry of liberation, and Christ’s creation of a new people. And when the time is right, he will reveal it in Christ’s Second Coming.

This is good news for God’s people who are struggling with poverty or wealth, hardship or ease, fear or false security, defeat or over-confidence. This is good news for us!

And this is the word of the Lord.