

# *Greeted By Divinity - The God Of Time*

*Bible Reading:*  
*Psalm 90*  
*Revelation 1: 4-8*

PREPARED BY  
KEN GEHRELS  
PASTOR  
CALVIN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH  
NEPEAN, ONTARIO

[Begin with reading of PSALM 90]

So - tell me: how does time move?  
If you had to draw a picture of history, how would it look?

Most cultures throughout history would tell you - a circle; time is a circle. Everything old is new again.  
What goes round comes round. There is nothing new under the sun. Lion King was right - it's a circle of life.

If you want to know more about all this - talk to Leo Van Arragon. It's what really gets his mojo going;  
don't need no test drive in any Kia.

Most cultures would tell you this..... except the Hebrews. Their culture was unique in having this view --  
that time is a straight line.  
History has a beginning point.  
It is going somewhere.  
And one day it will end.  
It does **NOT** keep going round and round and round.

That is the view of the Bible.  
In the beginning....  
that's how it starts.  
And throughout prophecies of an end-point.

It's the view of history that we all have grown up with. It is central to life in Western Culture. However —  
somewhere along the way, we have as a society somehow picked up this idea;  
actually got it from the Enlightenment  
we got this idea that we're on this linear trip **alone**.

The only guide, the only hope, the only pilot to this whole project of history is  
**human reason**.

At least.....  
..... that's what those in the know would have told us.

When there's a problem, give people an education.  
Provide people enough knowledge, enough learning and enough opportunities and eventually truth and right and  
justice and hope and progress will win out.

Which a lot of people accepted.....  
Until the Great War came along.  
Followed hard on the heels by another World War.  
Followed by a Cold War, and Vietnam.  
It continues with irritations such as the Middle East conflict and the whole Iraq thing.  
9/11.

Know what all of that did?  
Beat the stuffing out of any notion that human reason had transcendent power; that it was to be worshiped,  
somehow.  
Enter the whole idea of Post-Modernity.

Post-Modernity would say, "**We really DON'T know. We don't know any sense, any order, any Story about human history. No idea of where it came from or where it's going..... if anywhere. No idea if it's going in a circle, or heading straight; perhaps straight off a cliff.**"

*We've got no idea.  
So, you live with your ideas.  
I'll live with mine.  
And we'll see..... maybe."*  
That's roughly how it goes.  
Leo can tell you this far better.

As can Maj-Len.

She's one of our resident artists here in the congregation.

Got her training at *Ontario College Of Art*. Some time ago, while I was working on my project at the *Institute For Worship Studies* in the area of art & worship, she said to me,

*If you want to see the essence of Post-Modern life, check out contemporary art. It's full of despair. It's dark. It fights against meaning.*

Like this painting by Peter Howell.

His specialty is landscapes and then painting strange objects on them; plopped down in a deliberate attempt to flatten the space; to destroy the integrity of the landscape; and thereby to deny its meaning.

Or, these paintings by Francis Bacon and Riopelle.

Or, what has become almost an icon for many in Post-Modernity, this work by Edvard Munch - *The Scream*, a work ahead of its time, painted in 1893, but carrying the essence of contemporary angst.

He painted out of his own pain, experiencing much hurt and death in a short time during his youth.

In a magazine that goes by the name of *Suck*, Mark Dery wrote:

So, I scream, you scream, we all scream for Munch's *Scream*: What's all the yelling about? Obviously, the image strikes a sympathetic chord because we, like Munch, are adrift at the end of a century, amidst profound societal change and philosophical chaos, when all the old unsinkable certitudes seem to be going the way of the Titanic....

Our millennial anxiety is.... the toxic runoff of information overload: mounting concerns over global warming, worries about contaminated food and sexually-transmitted diseases and flesh-eating viruses, fear of domestic terrorism, paranoia about night-stalking pedophiles and teenage "super-predators," traumatic memories of satanic ritual abuse and alien abduction, premonitions of black helicopters over America, and, more prosaically, the everyday uncertainties of the downsized, overdrawn, time-starved, sleep-deprived masses.

Against that kind of a backdrop, each of you came to church this evening, and were greeted with these words:

*Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come.....*

Words that come from the opening chapter of *Revelation*.

Please read it with me.

[REVELATION 1:1-20]

Consider with me v.4.

*Grace to you and peace from him who is, and who was, and who is to come...*

A couple of weeks ago we meditated on the words

*Grace to you and peace.....*

Tonight I want to look at who gives that grace -

*Him who is, and who was, and who is to come.*

To get the significant, you'll want to put yourself in the shoes of the first readers of *Revelation* to whom John sent this letter. Many of them were Hebrews. Their minds would have flashed back to the Old Testament, back along that linear timeline to the early days of Israel's history.

God appears to Moses in the desert at the burning bush - Exodus 3.

And when Moses asks what His name is, the Lord declares (v.14)

*I am who I am.*

He is self-existent. Not dependent on any outside force or power.

Self-determining.

Unrivaled sovereign over all - over every square inch of Creation; over every measured foot along that timeline of history.

From beginning to end He is.

And in that context God goes on to provide a promise to Moses, a covenant promise that He would redeem his people, rescue them from slavery and bring them to the land promised their ancestor, Abraham.

In the middle of Hebrew slavery and suffering, where days dragged into months into years, where children were snatched and drowned, where fathers were worked to death - God says that He has not forgotten and is not powerless.

Where chaos and darkness and sin seem to be swirling all around; where it would seem that all one could do in response is scream.....

*I am that I am.*

John now writes to believers in a part of that linear timeline when they are under a full court press by the Roman government, when all who refused to bow to the Emperor and declare him the great power of history....

..... declare him to be *kurios*, Lord....

when those who refused to do that would have their well-being, and sometimes even their very lives threatened

In that kind of a time, just as Israel, the church needed to be reminded of the sovereignty of God.

God **IS**.

Someone once said that we live in the present; and the present is but a razor's edge between the past and the future.

We **DON'T** live on that sharp edge alone, proclaims *Revelation*.

*Grace to you and peace from Him who is.....*

*AND*

*.....who was and who is to come.....*

Remember what we read earlier from Psalm 90?

*"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*

In another prophecy:

*"For I the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6).*

God's existence anchors our existence.

Time is rooted in Him.

Both reaching back in time; and looking ahead.

Notice that the Holy Spirit doesn't move to John to write, *and who will be*, but rather

*and who is to come.....*

In other words, God doesn't just set the gears of history into motion and then walk away, as if He were some grand celestial watchmaker.

He stays keenly interested.

He stays involved.

He continues to intervene.

One of the greatest lies in western society is that while a person may believe that God put everything together, he has since left.

That's even taught in churches at times - we've heard it in Reformed churches through the teaching that all miracles and prophetic words have ceased. "*Only expect God in natural ways*" we're told.

Friends - don't ever, ever, ever accept that!!

God is moving;

God is coming.

History's linear movement from past, to present, to future has a goal and a direction, and that goal and direction is God himself.

God is the future.

The future does not belong to man, or to Pharaoh, or to the Roman Government, or to chance.

The future does not even belong to Satan.

The future belongs to God Himself and to God alone.

The God who *is to come*

The God and Father who sent His son; the One of whom we read:

*Look! He is coming with the clouds;*

*Every eye will see Him,*

*Even those who pierced Him;*

*And on His account all the tribes of the earth will wail.*

*So it is to be. Amen!"*

When you surrender your life to Jesus, you are under the protection of this God.

Your trip along the timeline of history is under His protecting care, and touched by His involved presence.

The grace we have in Christ cannot change or be taken away, because it flows from the great I AM WHO I AM.

It will give us eternal peace.

The first believers lived in a time of political turmoil - threats of wars.

Sound familiar?

It was a time of economic uncertainty.

Sound familiar?

Their faith was a minority and misunderstood.

Sound familiar?

And all around people were saying, *The only power to get us through is human power. Better acknowledge and bow before it.*

Sound familiar?

Believers in 2003,

*Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come.....*

Psalm 139 says - *if I make my bed in the depths you are there.*

Psalm 23 says - *when I go through the valley of the shadow of death... You are with me.*

The Bible doesn't promise us that we'll never have times when we go to bed caught in deep darkness; our lives caught in huge storms.

The Bible doesn't promise us immunity from having to walk the valley of the shadow of death.

What it **DOES** promise is that we **NEVER** have to face them alone!!

True, we live on the razor's edge between yesterday and tomorrow.

But we live, friends, —

We live between what Christ has already done - our heritage  
and

What Christ is yet to do - our hope

All of which we strive to reinforce here week after week with our liturgical actions. We reach into the past with something called *anamnesis*. You may recognize in there the word *amnesia*. It means "*remembering; bringing the past into the present.*" Anamnesis.

We do that every time we celebrate Holy Communion;  
the present participates in the great past event of the cross & resurrection.

We do it when we sing -

"Christ the Lord is risen..... *today*";

"Away In A Manger"

The past and present are intertwined.

Liturgically, we reach into the future with *prolepsis*; perhaps you recognize *pro...* which refers to the future.

**Prolepsis** means taking something into our experience beforehand, ahead of the chronological time when it will actually occur. God's future enters our moment on the razor's edge.

- in song: 612 "Lo! He Comes, With Clouds Descending"

So, also, into our rhythm of time we inject moments/occasions of remembering:

We mark days, weeks, and years.

Sabbath - the first day of the week; recalling the first day of Creation; also in church history known as the "*Eighth Day*", in anticipation of the New Creation; It is the weekly anniversary of Christ's resurrection

Hence we sing "*this is the day that the Lord has made..... This is the day that He rose again*" (241)

We mark the cycle of the year - Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost - labels and signposts at various points along our chronology of time that provide us moments of reaching back into God's saving work and remembering (*anamnesis*); and reaching forward with confident hope (*prolepsis*);

trusting and walking under the ever-watchful gaze of Him who greets us as the One who is and who was and who is to come.

Helping us to remember that

God is Himself, governed by nothing outside Himself.

God will remain the same through all eternity; never being overcome by anything outside Himself.

Forever faithful in His covenant.

Nothing can overcome His grace -

Not our sin.

Not the devil.

Not any force in history.

And so, in the face of growing post-modern darkness, we can witness and sing with confidence:

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come.

our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home.

Before the hills in order stood or earth received its frame, from everlasting you are God, to endless years the same.

A thousand ages in your sight are like an evening gone.  
short as the watch that ends the night before the rising sun.