

## Big Win Revelation 1:4b-8

### INTRODUCTION

The date is October 3, 1951. The setting is the Polo Grounds in New York City. It is the bottom of the ninth inning. The New York baseball Giants are trailing their crosstown rivals the Brooklyn Dodgers by two runs. Whoever won this game would clinch the National League Pennant and would advance to the World Series.

Ralph Branca was on the mound for the Dodgers as Bobby Thomson stepped to the plate. There were runners on second and third, leaving first base open. The logical move would have been to intentionally walk Thompson to load the bases and set up the force play, but the on deck hitter was Willie Mays. The Dodgers decided instead to pitch to Thomson.

Branca's first pitch was a called strike on the inside corner. His second pitch? Well, see for yourselves.

### PLAY VIDEO

The announcer on that call was Russ Hodges. His call would be named the "most famous call in all of sports." What a big win that was!

This is the final sermon in this sermon series titled "Kingdom Come." Throughout this series we have seen how life in the Coming Kingdom of Christ differs from life in this earthly kingdom. This sermon comes to you on Christ the King Sunday, a day we celebrate a big win – the final victory of Jesus Christ over the triple problems of sin, death and the devil. Today we proclaim as King of kings and Lord of lords!

This day also marks the end of the church calendar year. Next Sunday begins the new church year with the beginning of Advent. But the year ends today! Why? Because Christ is King! It's all over.

### **Spoiler alert! Jesus wins!**

With the arrival of Advent, we repeat the story of Jesus. He came as a baby, died on the cross for our sins and lives in the organization He created – His Church. Everything points to this Sunday when we announce the good news:

### **Our God Reigns!**

At the risk of sounding sacrilegious ... so what? The fact that some day in the future the Kingdom of Christ will come, and that Jesus will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords... what possible difference can that make for me today? So what?

- I'm living now. My problems are now. My worries are now. My mortgage payment is due now. My medical issues are now. My father's death is now.

You and I, along with multitudes of other believers, have been waiting more than 2,000 years for the return of Christ. And for all we know, it could take 2,000 years more. I don't think so, but it could! So really ... why should this day be a cause of celebration? Why celebrate a future event that we might never live to see?

As many of you know, two weeks ago today my father had a massive heart attack that would result in his death on the following Tuesday. Two days after my father's death, my Aunt Doris died. I have been helping her make her final arrangements and serving as her health care Power of Attorney. In these last 10 days I have officiated at both of their funerals. Tomorrow I will officiate at another funeral, not for a member of my family but a member of the Grace family. So I have been reading and re-reading a lot of funeral-related passages of Scripture lately.

And – as you know because I am constantly telling you to do this – before I read any passage of Scripture I always pray “Lord, let my eyes see something I've never seen before.” So, having prayed, I was reading the passage in John 11 where Lazarus died. If you know that passage...

- Jesus took His time to come even though He knew that His friend Lazarus was on his death bed.
- In the section of the story I was reading Jesus was now on the scene, and He was talking with the sisters of the dead man. They were grief-stricken of course, and truthfully they were a bit miffed that it took so long for Jesus to get there.
- Their conversation went something like this:

Jesus: “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.”

Martha: “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world. I also believe that if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

Jesus: “Remember, there is coming a day when your brother will rise again.”

Martha: I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. But that is off in the future sometime. You don't even know when it will happen. Today he is dead. Today my heart is breaking. How does believing you will one day reign do anything for my grief today?”

Does that question resonate with you at all?

- In these days when I am walking through the valley of the shadow of death, what difference does Christ the King Sunday make?
- If that question does not with you, I can guarantee it resonates with someone you know. There is someone in your life who right now is struggling with what appears to be a disconnect between the coming kingdom of Christ and the present realities of life. And that disconnect is making it hard to walk with Christ.
- In the words of Martha, “If you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

As one of the older pastors in my childhood would say:

What good is pie in the sky in the great by-and-by if your kids are starving today?

I have good news to share. It makes all the difference in the world. Because Jesus wins, these things are true:

### **#1: I AM LOVED BY GOD**

Verse 5b:

To him who loves us ... (Revelation 1:5)

Karl Barth is one of the greatest theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He spoke at Rockefeller Chapel (which is more like a Gothic cathedral) on the campus of the University of Chicago during his lecture tour of the U.S. in 1962. After his lecture, during the Q & A time, a student asked Barth if he could summarize his whole life's work in theology in a sentence. Barth replied: "Yes, I can. In the words of a song I learned at my mother's knee: 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'"

No matter who you are, no matter what you have done, no matter how unlovable the rest of the world may think you are, because Christ is King ... you are loved by God.

### **#2: I AM FREE FROM THE PENALTY OF SIN**

Verse 5 continues:

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ... (Revelation 1:5)

A man named David Simmons writes:

My family not only attended Sunday morning services, but also Sunday evening services as well.

Communion was always observed at each service. The servant leaders of the church would come forward to the communion table after a hymn about the sacrifice of Jesus had been sung. The white linen cloth that covered the trays and table was folded back, a prayer was said, and the emblems of the Lord's Supper were passed throughout the congregation. But, there was something dramatic that took place only on Sunday evenings.

After the communion prayer, the sanctuary lights were turned out and a red spotlight, strategically placed in the ceiling overhead, was turned on. Red light covered the communion table and the front of the sanctuary. This was serious! This was attention grabbing! This was truly a special and moving time. And the lesson was unmistakable: The blood of Jesus covers our sins.

The latter part of Revelation 1:5 says, "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood..."

Because of the tradition of the church I grew up in, I have never forgotten that it is the blood of Jesus that makes all the difference. His blood, shed for me,

has set me free from sin. The crucifixion of Jesus was horrible beyond description. When confronted with the truth of what took place there, we can come to only one conclusion. Jesus suffered, bled and died for me.

Because Jesus is King ... the chains of sin can bind us no more. The blood of Jesus sets us free.

### **#3: I AM A PART OF A KINGDOM**

Verse 6:

*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom ... (Revelation 1:6)*

I got to experience this firsthand over these past two weeks. Karen and I have been awestruck by the number of sympathy cards we have received ... not only from this congregation, but from other Christian brothers and sisters from all across the country. I even received one from my Aunt Doris, who died two days after my dad did. There have been numerous more Facebook expressions and personal emails and phone calls.

When we are part of the kingdom of Christ, we don't walk through tragic times alone. It is a lie when someone tells you that faith is a personal matter. 1 Corinthians 12 tells us:

*If one part (of the Body of Christ) suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. (1 Corinthians 12:26)*

That's possible because Christ is King.

### **#4: I AM A PRIEST SERVING MY GOD**

Verse 6 continues:

*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 ... (Revelation 1:6)*

One of the great benefits of the Kingship of Jesus is that you and I are able to have direct access to God. In Old Testament times only the priest had such access. Only the priest could talk to God. You talked to the priest. He talked to God.

But now you are a priest. Martin Luther described baptism as the "ordination into the priesthood of all believers."

### **APPLICATION**

Because Jesus wins, you win. Because Jesus is King, you can live what the Scriptures call a "victorious life" in Christ. And that's what we celebrate this day: Christ came to earth as a baby. He lived among us, teaching us and modeling the way. He died, was

buried, and rose again. He lives through His church, and one day – maybe soon – He will claim ultimate victory over all the forces of evil.

You know, those New York Giants, winners of the 1951 National League pennant, would go on to lose the World Series to the hated New York Yankees in six games. They were winners for only a few days.

But in the words of Handel's Messiah, quoting a passage in the Book of Revelation ...

And He shall reign forever and ever. (Revelation 11:15)

Amen.