

Revelation 1:4b-8

In ancient Rome the capture of an enemy army was something to be celebrated. A conquered army would be paraded down the main thoroughfare with political officials leading the parade. Men blowing trumpets would be next, followed by the war spoils in wagons. Defeated army officers in chains would come next in line, followed by the priests carrying incense burners they would wave so the fragrance permeated the air. At the end of the line would be the victorious military men, cheering for their win. (ILLUSARUS). There are some Christians who believe a victory parade will be in order when Christ returns, with those who kept the true faith leading the way, wearing armor, and trampling underfoot those who have chosen not to follow Jesus.

Today we celebrate the Reign of Christ. And we ask, what kind of ruler is Christ? And over what kind of Kingdom will he reign? In order to ask these questions, first of all we have to agree that Jesus Christ is Lord of all creation.

There is a story in the book *Out of Africa* by Isak (is-ak) Dinesen (dee-ne-sen) telling about a young man from the Kikuyu tribe. For three months this young man worked on her farm then he suddenly quit. Dinesen, surprised by his abrupt departure asked him why, all of a sudden he was quitting. He responded that he couldn't decide if he should become a Christian or a Muslim, so he determined he would work 3 months for a Christian to observe the ways of a Christian, and 3 months for a Muslim to study the ways of a Muslim. After observing both he would decide to become a Christian or a Muslim. Dinesen was horrified, writing that she believed even an Archbishop would have wanted that information ahead of time ("Preaching on the Lessons," by Marjorie Weiss, THE CLERGY JOURNAL, February 1995, p. 29).

I don't know if a person living in our house for 3 months would be persuaded to follow Christ, how about you? I don't think it's fair for a person to base their judgment of a religion by the words and actions of an individual, because we are all sinners. Sinners and saints at the same time, we *are* witnesses for Christ. But our witness does not supersede the power of Christ. There is no higher standard for living than the way of love he lived. His love is universal, dynamic, active, self-giving, for all persons... including those whom we would rather not love. Jesus, the Son of God revealed that God is love. As Christians we hold onto these words because we believe Jesus is Lord. Our reading from the first chapter of Revelation revealed this to us... He is the firstborn of the dead. He is the ruler of the earth's kings. Jesus the king has conquered death and equalized the power of earthly rulers, since death is the great equalizer. Our lesson also proclaims that Jesus has freed us from our sins.

We also believe that Jesus is more than God's representative, we believe Jesus is God present with us. When we want to know what God is like all we have to do is to look at Jesus. As Christians we believe that in order to see God, we only need to look at Jesus, his life, and his death upon the cross. Jesus lived out the love that he taught. His words and his witness were one. And when there was no other way to bring sinful humanity to God, he lay down his life as a willing sacrifice for all.

In an issue of the Upper Room a story is told about a family who visited an amusement park. They were in line for the roller coaster when an announcement was made that the ride would be closed down for a short time while minor repairs were made. As they watched, a repair man worked on the safety harness of the last seat. The riders waiting in line began to joke about avoiding the last car on the coaster, after all

the ride featured death defying loops and curves. But once the repair was completed the technician strapped himself into the car using the safety harness he had just repaired. Then he rode the ride all by himself. He was willing to risk his life to ensure that all who came after him would have a safe ride (*Upper Room*, May/June 1995)

Of course there were others before Jesus who laid down their life to save another, and there will be others coming after him who will do the same. But none were/are the Son of God, willing to save all of humanity.

C.I. Scofield was a brilliant preacher and theologian born in the United States before the Civil War. Although his ancestors were Puritans, he was not a Christian. In his 20s he was an attorney, a self-confessed drunkard who accepted bribes, committed forgery, and stole from his boss. Another attorney converted him to Christianity. In one of his writings, Scofield described how, shortly after he became a Christian he saw a painting of Daniel in the lion's den in a store window. It depicted Daniel, standing with his hands behind his back, looking upward as the lions encircled him. He was assuring the king who had unwillingly sentenced him to death in the lion's den, that God had protected him from physical harm.

Scofield recalls that he was filled with hope as he stood there gazing at the painting. He wrote, "Only a few days had passed since I, a drunken lawyer, had been converted; and no one had yet told me anything about the keeping power of Jesus Christ. I thought to myself, 'there are lions all about me too, such as my old habits and sins. But the One who shut the lions' mouths for Daniel can also shut them for me!' He goes on, "I knew that I could not win the battle in my own strength. The painting made me realize that while I was weak and helpless, my God was strong and able." The realization came that God had saved him and would also deliver him from the wild beasts in his life.

Scofield was a fortunate man who had come to know the saving power of Jesus Christ. How many of you know the Bible verse John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that whoever believes in him may not perish but have eternal life." At a worship service in the chapel at Grove City College when I was officially commissioned by the board of ministry, (the step before ordination), I came to understand the next verse, John 3:17 completes John 3:16 in a way we often forget. ""Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him." Not to condemn the world, but to save the world.

It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter where you've been or what you've done. Jesus came into this world so that you may be saved. Christ came into the world to save all people. The people welcoming Christ at his second coming will not be wearing body armor. They will have exchanged the dirty, torn clothing of their own righteousness for the white robes of Christ's righteousness. They will be rejoicing and giving thanks that God has accepted them just as they are but loved them too much to leave them there. How do we know this is true? Because our Lord Jesus, God's life on earth, has shown it to be true.

All glory be to God.