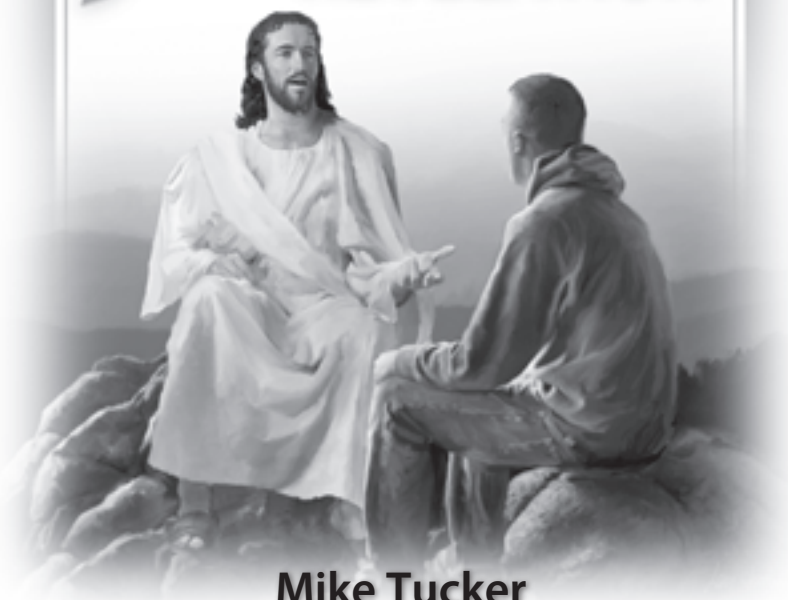


# MEETING Jesus

in the  
Book of REVELATION



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Pacific Press® Publishing Association  
Nampa, Idaho  
Oshawa, Ontario, Canada  
[www.pacificpress.com](http://www.pacificpress.com)

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# Introduction

**A**lthough I grew up in a church that emphasizes the biblical book of Revelation, I've never liked it. In fact, when reading that book, or just hearing someone preach from it—I got nightmares.

My experience as a pastor tells me that I am not alone. Many others have had the same problem. A lot of good, church-going people wish the Bible had ended with Jude. Sixty-five books, instead of sixty-six, would have done quite nicely!

Many people have shared their stories with me—stories of fearful visions of strange science fiction–like beasts with bloodthirsty appetites. They are haunted by dreams of the end-time scenario painted by evangelists and the gut-wrenching, heart palpitating terror of being found unprepared for the final test. Nightmares of torture, hiding in the wilderness, and living like escaped convicts attempting to avoid capture—all interrupt their sleep. These people were terrorized by the knowledge that they had not memorized all of the proof texts and therefore could be subject to the deceptions of the end time.

Well-educated men and women have shared with me their unreasoning fear of the close of probation, the time of trouble, the seven last plagues, and of being lost. Thoughts of having one unconfessed sin paralyze them. They don't understand exactly what the dragon with seven heads and ten crowns, the beast from the sea, the beast from the

land, and the whore of Babylon represent. These images are too weird, too frightening, and too disturbing for them to study. Their experiences of fear and uncertainty have caused them to hate the book of Revelation.

I can identify with their fears. They are telling my story, my experience with this book of the apocalypse.

When you are a pastor in a denomination that emphasizes Revelation, it is not a good idea to hate that book, so I decided to make a special study to see why this last book of the Bible seemed to carry such a startlingly different message than I had found in the sixty-five books that precede it.

What I found astonished me! The picture of Revelation that had been shared with me was inaccurate. I learned that any understanding of Scripture that creates an unreasonable fear is a false understanding, because Jesus Himself declared that He had not given us a “spirit of fear.”

At the heart of this mysterious book of strange symbols and ominous forebodings is a portrait of Jesus. It is a picture so attractive as to make Him irresistible. I found messages of grace, hope, comfort, encouragement, and absolute assurance. I discovered Revelation assures us that the victory has already been won, and that we have absolutely nothing to fear as long as we cling to Jesus, our loving Savior!

So startling were my discoveries that Revelation has now become one of my favorite books of the Bible. Now I can actually read this great book and sleep peacefully at night.

I offer this devotional study of Revelation for one purpose: to help rid you of your fear of the end of time and the uncertainty that so many have experienced as they read the last book of the Bible. It is my hope that after reading my book, you will see in Revelation a masterpiece of God’s great love.

Perhaps we will form a recovery group, sort of an AA for those who have lived in fear of Revelation. We will begin each meeting with, “Hello. I’m Mike, and I’m a Revelation-fear-aholic.”

“Hi, Mike!”

## *Introduction*

“It’s been thirty-four days since I last lost sleep over Revelation.”

Applause!

Maybe that’s not such a good idea. Instead, it might actually be better to join the group described in Revelation. This group does not share stories of fear or doubt. They simply sing a song that goes like this:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength  
and honor and glory and praise!” . . .

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be praise and honor and glory and power,  
for ever and ever!” (Revelation 5:12, 13).

After all, that is what this book is about. It is about Jesus, the Lamb of God, slain for your sins. It is about the victory He has won and His promise to share that great victory with you.

I invite you to take a look again at this marvelous book. As we look we will see a series of portraits of Jesus. Each portrait will reveal something different about the character and work of Jesus, the Hero of Revelation. One snapshot will show Him as the Source of our hope, another as our Deliverer, and yet another as our Defender. Each picture tells us something new about Jesus. Collectively, they place our hearts and our minds at ease.

During World War II, when the Nazis were bombing London, families sent their children to the country to live with families out of harm’s way. As traumatic as this was on children and parents alike, it was far better than allowing the children to run the risk of serious injury or death.

Julie was a five-year-old who was sent to live with a family she had never met. It was a difficult time for this child. The family Julie stayed with was very nice, but they weren’t *her* family.

One night Julie’s host mother could hear the child’s sobs, so she went in to comfort the child. After a few hugs and kind words, the

woman made a suggestion. “Why don’t you place the photograph of your mummy and daddy on the pillow next to you, and whenever you are frightened or feel lonely or homesick, you can turn the light on and look at your parents. If you imagine them being here with you it will make you feel better. You won’t feel afraid anymore.”

Julie found that it helped to look at Mummy and Daddy’s photograph. It wasn’t the same as having them right there by her side, but it helped. When Julie looked at the photograph, she remembered how much Mummy and Daddy loved her and how good it felt to be with them, and it helped.

Mummy and Daddy wrote letters often, and the nice lady Julie lived with would read the letters to her over and over again. Julie loved the words and would almost memorize each one, able to recite them by heart.

Finally the day came when Mummy and Daddy came to get Julie and take her home. It was a great day for Julie. Her parents gathered their little girl into their arms and hugged and kissed her and took her home to be with them.

That’s what Revelation is. It is a series of photographs of the One who loves you and is coming to get you. He does not want you to be afraid, so He has given you photographs to remind you of how wonderful He looks to you. He has written letters to you to remind you of His love and to promise you that He is coming to get you and take you home. That’s what Revelation is, a series of letters and photographs from the One who loves me and promises to come and take me home.

My hope is that my book will help you begin to think of Revelation differently than you have before. In the midst of this war-wracked planet, my prayer is that you will see the book of Revelation as a series of photographs and letters that will help you sleep peacefully rather than, as it has for so many, give you nightmares.



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CHAPTER ONE

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# The One Who Loves You

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*Revelation 1:1–7*

I've been exchanging e-mails with a student from a theological seminary in Egypt. He tells me that Jesus was a prophet but, definitely, not the Son of God. Though respecting Jesus, the seminarian tells me that Jesus did not die for our sins.

An overachieving, workaholic entrepreneur told me that Jesus has never held much of an appeal for him. Jesus seemed rather morose and preoccupied with His own death. "That sort of meek and mild disposition would," he said, "never make it in the dog-eat-dog business world I work in."

Who is Jesus? How do you think most people in the world would answer that question? How do most people see Jesus?

I am intrigued by the opening shots of the movie *La Dolce Vita*. This Italian movie opens with a shot of a helicopter and a giant statue of Jesus suspended underneath. The statue hangs in a sling with its arms outstretched as the helicopter approaches Rome.

People begin to recognize the statue. A farmer sees the helicopter, hops off his tractor, and races across the field shouting, "Hey, it's Jesus!" Girls sunbathing around a swimming pool look up and wave at the statue.

The expression on the statue's face seems sorrowful. He stares in silent disbelief at the modern world below.



Some people see Jesus as a lot like that hovering statue. Jesus looks down on a world He doesn't really understand. He is out of touch. He has no relevance in a world that has long ago passed Him by.

Who is Jesus, and how does He relate to us today? Ask that question of modern scholars and you get a confusing picture. Even biblical scholars disagree about Jesus. Some present Him as everything from a societal dropout to a militant revolutionary.

The best place to look for the answer to the question "Who is Jesus?" may not be with theologians. Sometimes the best answers to such questions are found in the mouths of babes.

Helen was three years old. One evening, Helen and her parents were dining at a Chinese restaurant. At the end of the meal her parents broke open their fortune cookies and read them aloud.

Helen wanted to "read" her fortune too. After breaking the cookie apart and retrieving the fortune, Helen announced proudly, "It says, 'Jesus loves me!'"

Who is Jesus? The simplest answer to this question may be the best.  
*Jesus is the One who loves you!*

Revelation is a book we do not usually think of as giving this picture of Jesus. I believe that when properly understood, however, Revelation paints a wonderful portrait of Jesus as *the One who loves us*.

Revelation is best understood as an unveiling of Jesus. The opening phrase of the book confirms this premise: "The revelation of Jesus Christ . . ." (Revelation 1:1).

This book was intended to reveal Jesus Christ to a world desperately in need of a glimpse of our Savior. It was intended to give us hope, to assure us of victory, and to put troubled minds at ease. John wants us to know that these words of comfort and hope are authentic. He received them from Jesus with a little help from an angel. "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:1, 2).

The book of Revelation reminds us that Jesus is sovereign, and that

He is ultimately victorious. It reassures us that those who can be counted among His followers will be victorious with Him.

There is another purpose for the book, the one most expositors focus on, which is to tell us the future. God wants us to know the things that will take place. However, even this purpose reveals Jesus and His character.

An ancient legend tells of a general whose army was afraid to fight. The enemy was too strong. Its fortress was too high and weapons too mighty. The general had an idea. He told his soldiers that he possessed a prophetic coin that would foretell the outcome of the battle. On one side was an eagle, on the other a bear. He would toss the coin. If it landed eagle-side up, they would win. If it landed with the bear side up, they would lose.

The army was silent as the coin flipped in the air. Soldiers circled as it fell to the ground. They held their breath as they looked and shouted when they saw the eagle. The army would win!

Bolstered by the assurance of victory, the men marched against the fortress and won. It was only after the victory that the king showed the men the coin. It had an eagle on both sides.

Though the story is fictional, the truth is reliable: *Assured victory empowers the army*. That may be the reason God gives us this revelation of Christ. In it He assures victory.

Christ knows that we face an awful battle. However, He does not want His children to be afraid. He loves us too much for that, so He tells us in advance exactly how the battle will end.

We, the soldiers, are privileged to have a glimpse into the final battlefield. At the end, all hell breaks loose as all heaven comes forth. The two worlds collide in the ultimate battle of good and evil. Left standing amidst the smoke and thunder is the Son of God.

Jesus, born in a manger, is now triumphant over Satan. Satan is defeated. Christ is triumphant. And we, the soldiers, are assured of victory.

Who is Jesus? He is the General who ensures victory. He assures you that there is no reason for fear, because He already knows how the battle will turn out! Jesus wins!

## MEETING JESUS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

This revelation of Jesus was written to put your mind at ease. You are greatly loved! Your sins are forgiven! Your salvation is sure. The ultimate victory belongs to Jesus.

Revelation gives us wonderful portraits of our Savior, portraits that bring comfort to our fear-filled hearts.

George Macdonald wrote, “God hides nothing. His very work from the beginning is revelation—a casting aside of veil after veil, a showing unto men of truth after truth. On and on from fact divine he advances, until at length in his Son, Jesus, he unveils his very face.”

This is what we find as we work through Revelation. We find that this mysterious book reveals wonderful photographs that become a source of comfort and hope.

In the first two verses of Revelation we find how this revelation of hope came to us. Verse 1 tells us that God gave it to Jesus, Jesus gave it to His angel, the angel took it to John, and John wrote the message down for us to read.

Revelation has been called the Apocalypse. *Apocalypse* simply means “unveiling.” Through this book, God intends to pull back the curtain for us. That which was hidden will now be revealed.

What is God unveiling? Verse 1 tells us that God is revealing to us “what must soon take place.” As the story of the army general and the prophetic coin would suggest, God wants us to know how the battle is going to turn out. We can peek at the final chapters of the book of the history of this world and find that Jesus wins—and we are told in some detail how all of this will take place.

Much of what John was to reveal about the future has already been fulfilled. Some is yet to come. But we are given a sneak peek at what lies ahead.

Revelation also unveils Jesus Himself. We are given a deeper look at the character of the Son of God, our Savior. In seeing a revelation of Jesus, we also see a revelation of God the Father, since, as Jesus told us, when we see the Son we also see the Father.

In this book, we find the loving concern of God for His children. We see God caring enough to show us that we do not need to be afraid.

## *The One Who Loves You*

Remember how the disciples reacted when Jesus told them He was going away from them? Jesus was speaking of His death, burial, and resurrection, but the disciples did not understand. Like young children whose parents are leaving on a trip, the disciples ask questions. “Where are You going? Can we come too? When will You come back?”

We tend to ask similar questions. “Jesus, where have You gone? Can we come there to be with You? When will You come to get us?” Revelation attempts to answer some of those questions. The Father is here attempting to put His children’s minds at ease about the future. Yes, Jesus is away from us right now, but He is coming back soon. However, He doesn’t want to lie to us, so He tells us that it may be a while and some difficult things will unfold in the meantime. But we don’t have to worry, because our Father is bigger and stronger than any enemy we face, and eventually He will take us home with Him.

Verse 3 tells us that a blessing awaits us if we will read the letter and keep it. “Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.”

A blessing awaits all who read, hear, and keep this prophecy. A blessing awaits you. It has been my experience that the best blessings are the gift of Jesus Himself. When heaven desires to give the very best it can offer, it gives Jesus.

John,

To the seven churches in the province of Asia:

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, 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, 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.

## MEETING JESUS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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 (Revelation 1:4–7).

John's opening greeting contains two gifts. Those gifts are grace and peace. Grace refers to all the gifts of the wondrous love of God that we cannot earn or deserve. R. C. Charles defines "peace" as "the harmony restored between God and man through Christ."

Already, God is putting our minds at ease by reminding us of the gifts we receive from His hand—grace and peace—undeserved gifts of love and a restored relationship with the Father.

But also notice the reference to the Trinity. First, we are given an interesting name for God the Father. "Him who is and who was and who is to come . . ." is a common reference to God the Father. It is a takeoff on the name God gave to Himself at the burning bush, "I AM that I AM" or "Yahweh."

The "seven Spirits who are before His throne" refers to the Holy Spirit. The number seven is the number of perfection and puts us in mind of the perfect and complete gifts of the Holy Spirit. The number seven in Hebrew means literally "Sabbath, cease, rest." Some of the churches in Asia to whom the letter was originally written were being persecuted. This was a promise that the Holy Spirit, who is the Creator of the church and Sustainer of the church, would use His gifts to provide a Sabbath rest even in the midst of persecution.

Finally, we have "Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness." The message of Revelation comes from all Three Members of the Trinity. All of Them have joined Their immense talents together to paint a series of wonderful portraits of Jesus.

Verse 5 reminds those who could very well be martyred that Jesus has already won the victory over death. They have nothing to fear from the grave. "Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth."

## *The One Who Loves You*

Jesus is the Giver of grace and peace. He is the Faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead.

There was a time during the most horrible persecutions of the Jews by the Nazis in Poland that an old Jewish cemetery keeper came into the cemetery one morning and found that during the night a woman had crept into an open grave and there given birth to a son. After she had given birth, she had died. The cemetery keeper found this child, and he said to everyone he saw, "This must be the Messiah, for only the Messiah could choose to be born in a grave."

Well, it wasn't the Messiah; the child died before noon of that day, but the cemetery keeper's conclusion spoke truth. Only the Messiah could choose to be born in a grave. Only a God who loves as our God loves could come into the midst of all the pain of our lives to bring His grace.

Jesus is the One who loves us, who has set us free from our sins by His blood. Jesus is the Ruler of kings on earth. He has made us a kingdom, priests, to His God and Father. To Him be glory and dominion forever!

Before John attempted to reveal to us the awesome and frightful things that were yet to come, He attempted to place the minds of his readers at ease. He did so by reminding them of perhaps the most important truth the world has ever known: Jesus is coming again.

It is as if John tells the readers: "Now, I'm going to say some frightening things, but do not be alarmed. Remember that you are the recipients of God's grace and peace. You are His special children, and He will care for you. Ultimately, Jesus will win the war, so don't allow the terrible battles to discourage you."

It does not matter what the future holds, because in the Trinity we have everything we need. God the Father is the One who ultimately is and was and is to come. He is this One who makes Himself known, the One who is the Author of grace and peace. The Holy Spirit is described as being in fellowship with the Father and Son and the One who from the presence of the Father and Son sends grace and peace to the churches. Jesus Christ is described in the most detail because He

## MEETING JESUS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

is the Living Word. In Jesus Christ, God is speaking for Himself, the very radical breakthrough of God in history.

Jesus Christ is God making Himself known as Lord, Savior, Victor over death, the One who loves and sets free by the event of His own suffering on our behalf, the One who is now our living Lord and who will come again. He will come, and all of His children will witness the event.

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 (Revelation 1:7).

Only a God of love would make such a promise!

Nothing makes sense without the return of Jesus. Without the Second Coming, there is no salvation, no hope, and no future. But for all who love Christ, His return is the most comforting promise in Scripture.

Jesus attempts to comfort the disciples with this thought in the fourteenth chapter of John: “ ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. . . . And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am’ ” (John 14:1, 3).

The book of Revelation provides a simple scenario: Jesus has gone away for a while, but He will return. Until then, He wants His children to be at peace. Isn't what Jesus promises wonderful? “ ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me’ ” (John 14:1).

Jesus doesn't want you to be anxious about things you cannot comprehend. If you don't understand the mark of the beast, the millennium, the judgment, and the seven last plagues, don't worry. Trust in Jesus; He will see you through.

If you are afraid that you will not be ready, trust in Jesus, and He will save you. “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” Jesus is coming to get you so you can live with Him.

## *The One Who Loves You*

By the way, He has plenty of room for you. “ ‘In my Father’s house are many rooms’ ” (verse 2).

Later in the book of Revelation, Jesus tells us the size of the city and reassures us that a place is prepared for us there. You will not be excluded—you will not be rejected. You are wanted in heaven.

All of heaven expects you and has made provision for you. Urban crowding is not a problem. “ ‘I am going there to prepare a place for you’ ” (verse 2). We will live in luxury with opportunities for both privacy and fellowship. Jesus has planned the city with you in mind. He has considered your needs, and your likes and dislikes.

A few years ago, a Kiwanis Club in Arlington, Texas, honored me as their “Man of the Year.” A banquet was prepared, with me as the guest of honor.

As Gayle and I sat down to eat, a lovely plate was set before us. The main course at the banquet to honor me was pork chops. Gayle and I are Seventh-day Adventists, and members of our denomination do not eat pork!

Gayle and I ate around the meat. That fact did not go unnoticed. When asked, we explained that Seventh-day Adventists do not eat pork. They were terribly embarrassed! We tried to put their minds at ease by telling them that this was not a big deal, but their faces were red with embarrassment because they had not planned well for their guest of honor.

Rest assured that God has planned well for you. He has designed a place specifically for you. “ ‘I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am’ ” (verse 3).

Jesus is serious about coming for you. He is determined that your fearful mind be placed at ease. He will take care of you, and then He will return for you so you can be with Him forever.

George Tulloch displayed similar determination. In 1996 Tulloch led an expedition to the spot where the *Titanic* sank in 1912. He and his crew recovered numerous artifacts, everything from eyeglasses to jewelry to dishware.



Tulloch realized that a large piece of the hull had been broken from the ship and was resting not far from the vessel. Tulloch and his crew were thrilled by the prospect of recovering, not just a few artifacts, but a part of the ship itself.

The team began to lay plans to raise this rather large portion of the ship out of its watery grave and set it on their own boat. The portion of the *Titanic* they wanted to recover weighed about twenty tons.

Tulloch and his team actually lifted that huge chunk of iron to the surface, but a storm blew in and broke the ropes. The crew watched as the Atlantic reclaimed her treasure.

Time was running out, and the crew knew they would need to leave soon. But before Tulloch left, he did something curious. He descended once again to the floor of the ocean in his submarine, and with a robotic arm attached a strip of metal to a section of the hull. On the metal Tulloch had written, "I will come back, George Tulloch."

Why did George think it was necessary to leave a plaque? Did he think that someone would steal the *Titanic*? One would think that since the ship is two and one-half miles below the surface of the Atlantic, it would be safe. Besides that, it's a piece of junk. Who would want it?

Isn't this the same thing many have said about us? "What makes you think God would go to such lengths to rescue you? What possible value could you be to Him?"

Amazing as it may seem, when Jesus left the depths of this planet, He did something similar to what Tulloch did. He left a written promise of His return. "I will come back and take you to be with Me so that you may be where I am going."

Who is Jesus? Already we have learned something of Him. Jesus is the Revealer of secrets—the Revealer of those things yet to take place.

Jesus is also the Giver of the gifts of grace (undeserved forgiveness) and peace (a right relationship with God).

Jesus is the Faithful Witness. We can trust that everything He says is true and accurate.

## *The One Who Loves You*

As the Firstborn from the dead, Jesus is our assurance that death isn't the final answer to life. We will be resurrected from the grave, too, just as Jesus was.

We can trust that this is true because Jesus possesses all power. He is the true Ruler over the kings of the earth. We have nothing to fear of earthly governments. Jesus is the true Power behind all power. They can do nothing to you that He does not permit.

Jesus loves us and has provided for our salvation. He is our Savior, having shed His blood in a self-sacrificial act to set us free from the bondage of our sins. Jesus is the One who promises to give us positions of authority and honor. He will make us "kings and priests."

Jesus is the One who will return to take us to heaven so we will never experience the pain of separation again.

Jesus is our General who instills confidence in His followers by guaranteeing our ultimate victory. Assured victory empowers the army. Assured victory puts our minds at ease and gives us peace.

Jesus is the One who loves us.

This is the picture of Jesus given in the first seven verses of Revelation. In seven short verses, John the artist has painted with delicate detail the beginnings of a portrait of Jesus.

If this were all the information we had about Jesus, it would be enough for our salvation. We have learned much of our Savior, but we also learn something of who we are. We are beloved of God, priests on the earth, which means that we have a duty to minister to others. We are those who have been set free—set free from our sins and set free from the need to panic about the toils of our troubled generation. And finally, we are those for whom Christ is returning.

Who is Jesus?

Revelation tells us that He is the God who loves you, who redeemed you, and who is returning for you. Jesus is the God who assures you of victory in your life—victory today and victory as we face an uncertain future.