

Waking to Sovereignty

Revelation 1

January 21, 2001

Peter Hiett

In preparing for this message I could not get a conversation out of my mind. It's one I had a while back with a friend who I think is absolutely brilliant, who God has used in my life in tremendous ways. The conversation happened at dinner, so I don't know if he really meant what he said, or if he was musing out loud.

At one point in the conversation he said, "Hey, Peter. What do you think of this recent election fiasco?" or something like that. I said, "Honestly, I think it's maybe a *God joke* or something." He shot back, "*A joke? It's evil.*"

He might know, because he hangs out closer to some of those folks. He hangs out with some very powerful people, people who St. John would call "the rulers—the kings—of the earth." We kept talking about politics, and I said, "Really my problem with the Democrats doesn't have to do with taxes, the economy, etc. It has to do with abortion. It's a real problem for me."

I realize it can be complicated . . . the past and how that affects a pregnancy . . . rape, incest, the future . . . is the child wanted. My friend basically agreed with me on the sanctity of human life, but then he said, "The problem is, no matter what you do it's not going to change anything. You see, the Republicans don't really care about changing anything. I *know*. They're not going to overturn Roe vs. Wade."

He informed me of some surprising realities involving government and the kings of the earth. I think he was making an argument that we need to be rather pragmatic about where we can win. I finally said something like this: "I guess the bottom line for me is it's not really what the government does or doesn't do but what I do and whether it honors God."

My friend leaned back and said, "To be honest, I think this may be where we see things differently. I'm not *sure* that God is always in control. This idea of omnipotence is a Greek idea—'*All power.*' I believe Jesus won at Calvary, I believe He will win in the end, but I don't think He's always in control."

Then he said, "Go to Auschwitz and stand there like I did, and tell me God's in control. Such suffering? Under His sovereignty?"

You see what he means. God won the war at the cross . . . is going to win in the end . . . but maybe He's not in control of every little battle in your life. He'd like to help, but He can't. That means then that we have to be pragmatic about winning.

I said to him, "It sounds like you're saying God *needs* you." He said, "Of course! You need the people you love, don't you? You *need* them. God *needs* me."

You know, that is really an exhilarating thought . . . He *needs* me. And it's absolutely horrifying.

I always have trouble sleeping after Session meetings, especially about a year ago when we went through a time when the building stuff just was not coming together . . . budgets, plans, procedures, people's opinions . . . I didn't know what was right . . . I don't know that any of the elders knew what was right . . . we would have these meetings . . . I would get out at 1:00 in the morning totally stressed!

I found myself during that time, time and time again, reading.

- Perhaps in my car overlooking Denver on Lookout Mountain, reading under the dome light.
- Or sitting on the couch at 2:00 in the morning, curled up in a blanket . . .

Reading the book of *Revelation*. And I didn't know what it all meant. I still don't. One thing, however, was absolutely clear. God is in control . . .

Every where,
Every when, and
Every how.

Then I could go to sleep. Blessed are those who read.

Revelation 1:1: *The revelation of Jesus* [apocalypse of Jesus] . . .

Apocalypso means to "unveil." The Bible ends with a great unveiling—the Revelation. And the Bible begins with a great veiling—"Katacalypso." The Great Serpent (the Dragon) is conquered in The Revelation. But the Great Serpent (the Dragon) shows up in the garden at the beginning of Scripture and tempts the man and the woman. He seduces them with the dream of their own absolute sovereignty. The great snake says to them, "Hey—eat the fruit. Make yourself like God."

So they eat, they know shame, and God casts them out of the garden. God had told them, "The day you eat the fruit of the tree you die." Adam and Eve become the walking dead, asleep in the illusion of their own sovereignty. They can no longer see God, and all His glory is veiled.

Adam and Eve,
Blind, dead, and enslaved
To the Dragon—the Great Serpent.
The dream . . . is a nightmare,
And it turns to hell.

Alone in the insane self-centered dream of our own sovereignty—hell.

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.

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.

John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia

The seven churches were seven small bands of baby believers in the province of Asia who were beginning to face immense persecution at the hands of the kings of the earth.

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. (Did you get that? Jesus is 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 (some versions say “kings and priests”) to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

To Him who freed us! The only people free in the book of Revelation are those who have been freed by the blood of the Lamb: The Church. They are kings and priests.

Do you see how incredibly weird this picture is? Kings and priests . . . The Church? Those seven, little churches? It’s like a God joke on the kings of the earth, because the kings of the earth are not where the action is in The Revelation.

The action is with a baby,
the Lamb that was slain,
 Who turns out to be born of a woman,
 in Revelation 12,
 Who is clothed in the sun
 and wears twelve stars on her head.

I believe that woman is us—the people of God. Israel who contains the promise gives birth to the child who is caught up to heaven—Jesus. The Dragon hates the child and pursues the woman into the wilderness. God guards her—us, for the Dragon hates the brothers and sisters of the child who was taken to Heaven.

Jesus is born of us. He is fully human as well as fully divine. He is born of us and saves us—His mother, and His brothers, and His sisters—The Church. He even said it: “Who

is my mother and who is my brother and who is my sister? All those who do the will of my Father in heaven.”

Who is that? Us! . . . I hope. The Church. Jesus said so in Matthew 12. Remember that. But now the action is with some baby believers in Asia Minor. They, in fact, are the real kings and priests, while the kings of this world are only pawns in the hands of Jesus the Christ in the service of His Father and His brothers and sisters. For He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Look, he is coming with the clouds and every eye shall see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

He sounds pretty much in control. In fact, that word "Almighty"—"Pantokrator" in Greek—can be translated "omnipotent"—*all powerful*. It's not some abstract, philosophical omnipotence; it means actual control over everything. ". . . Lord God who is, was, and is to come, Almighty." That's a reference to the Hebrew "Yahweh Sabaot"—absolute and unrivaled power and control over . . .

All time,
All space,
All history.

God is in control . . .

Every time,
Every place, and
Every how.

He accomplishes all things according to the council of His will. He never loses control. He only *surrenders* control. Even then, He only surrenders it to Himself, the Son surrendering it to the Father. Then it's according to plan, and what appears to be His greatest loss—crucified in shame on a Friday—we find out is His greatest victory of all time . . . if you can even measure it that way.

On that Sunday we find out about Easter,
the grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You see, in the book of Revelation there is never any question of God's victory . . .

Every when,
Every where, and
Every how.

- There is never any question about God's absolute control, even possibly through vessels of wrath (we don't know for sure . . . Paul says maybe, maybe not). But He's *in control*.
- There is never any question about the Dragon and what the Dragon will do.
- There is never any question about what the *beast* will do.

- There is never any question about what the *harlot* will do.
- There is never any question about what the kings of the earth will do, or whether or not there will be famines and plagues and earthquakes and natural disasters.

They *will* come according to plan. None of that is in question. The only question in the book of Revelation is . . . *you*—The Church.

This is where computers are great and you can check me out on this . . . the only “if” in the book of The Revelation regards you—The Church. I know this is a paradox of time and a paradox of eternity. It’s a paradox of sovereignty and freedom, predestination and free will, but the question is this: Will you conquer?

In Ephesus will they repent of dead works and conquer?
 In Pergumum will they renounce idols and conquer?
 In Thyatira will they repent of immorality and conquer?
 In Philadelphia will they hold fast and conquer?
 In Laodicea will they humble themselves and conquer?

Will *they*, will *you*, conquer?

Against the *Dragon*? How are we going to find the strength to conquer? I think that’s what the whole vision is about. It’s not as if John wrote seven letters to these churches and then said, “Oh, by the way, I had this vision.” They must read it, hear it, and surrender to it. That is, they must surrender their sovereignty to God’s sovereignty. They must surrender their *dream* of sovereignty to the reality of God’s sovereignty in Jesus the Christ.

When we do, we are hidden in Him,
 Lost in Jesus, found in Jesus;
 When we do, we are the body of Christ,
 And *Jesus always conquers*.

Jesus always wins! Even when He dies He wins.

An Englishman immigrated to the United States of America and decided to become a citizen. He went back home to London to spend some time on vacation with his family, and his family started giving him a hard time. “What did you hope to gain by becoming an American citizen?” He said, “Well, for one thing, I won the Revolutionary War.”

You see—that battle’s already over! If you surrender sovereignty to Jesus, you always win.

Every where,
 Every when, and
 Every how.

“Thanks be to God,” writes Paul, “who in Christ *always* leads us in triumph.” Then he wrote, “*All* things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose.” In Ephesians: “May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of his glory . . . the immeasurable greatness of His power.”

To those of us who believe, like we talked about last week, God has put *all things* (that’s a big word!) under Jesus’ feet. He has made Him head over all things. Why? For The Church . . . which is His body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all.

All creation,
 The kings of the earth,
 The plagues,
 The famines,
 The dragons,
 The sufferings . . .

. . . become instruments in the hands of Jesus, for loving you—His church.

Remember the last two sermons? I preached those so that maybe you could begin to really believe this. Jesus is Lord over time; Jesus is Lord over space.

All time and space
 Become instruments in His hands
 For loving you.

He literally transforms past, present, and future, for the love of you. When you repent, even your past sins are transformed into a means of unveiling for you the wonders of His mercy. Think of it . . . natural disasters . . . the kings of the earth . . . famines . . . plagues . . . even dragons and demons . . . space and time—no big challenge for Jesus.

 But He died for you
 That you would surrender
 Your dream of sovereignty
To Him in love.

Surrender happens *now*—the present moment. Eternity touches time *now*. *Now* is the day of salvation, writes Paul. I surrender *now*—the point at which eternity touches time—and all time is transformed. He can He *do* that? He’s the Lord of time.

My past . . . transformed;
 My future . . . sealed and secure.

It also means this: It really doesn’t matter what the kings of the earth do or don’t do. They are only pawns in my Savior’s hand. It matters what *I* do . . . *now*. That *I* walk in the obedience of faith. What I’m saying is:

I'm not called to win;
I'm not called to conquer;
I'm called to surrender . . . *now*.

When I surrender, He gives me the victory—the win. Thanks be to God who in Christ Jesus gives us the victory,

Every when,
Every where, and
Every how.

This may be another way of saying it:

As soon as I think *I'm* in control,
As soon as I think Peter Hiett
 can preach a really great sermon
 that could save somebody,
As soon as I think I could enact legislation
 that would affect the kings of the earth
 and change things,
As soon as I think I could bring the kingdom . . .

I'm dreaming. And I'm dead, enslaved to the Dragon and the beast.

Hear me well. Jesus may do all those things through me . . . save people . . . enact legislation . . . bring the kingdom . . . but without Him I can do nothing. My calling is to surrender sovereignty to Him. In other words, my calling is *faith* . . . *trust* . . . every moment.

Surrendering to God's sovereignty means dying to the dream of my own sovereignty. And that hurts. But He'll help me do it. *I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom* (or sovereignty) . . . Did you get that phrase? John, your companion in the suffering and kingdom, or "suffering and sovereignty."

What a phrase! I don't think Peter Hiett has much authority to speak to Auschwitz survivors. I've hardly ever suffered! But John can preach to them. ". . . your companion in suffering and sovereignty." We usually only get one or the other, but he said, "Suffering *and* sovereignty . . ."

. . . *and patience endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.* (You see, he had probably seen all of his friends martyred. He was the last one left, and he was exiled to this desert island.)
On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. (A voice so real he turns around in order to *see* it! The words of this voice create reality itself.) *And when I turned I saw seven*

golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone “like a son of man,” dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.

His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

Last week I reminded you that if you wake a person too quickly from a dream, you could kill him, just with shock. In our own dreams, our minds are sovereign—they are in control. The thing that wakes us is something outside our sovereignty and our control.

And the children of Adam are dead
In a dream of their own control.

John *saw* the voice. That means, he *saw* the Word of God, “in whom and by whom all things were made, who is before all things, in whom all things hold together.” John’s dream of his own sovereignty was utterly shattered. He fell at the feet of reality as though dead. You see, he now realized that every atom in his body was held together by the express will of this voice.

Every heartbeat,
Every breath—
His gift,
Every moment.

And he could see it.

Did you know that your next heartbeat exists solely because of the express will of Jesus Christ our Lord in God His Father? Because He wills it? Do you believe that? Not really. You consent to it, but if you really believed it, you’d be on the floor.

John woke to the sovereignty of God and collapsed in terror.

Many years ago when Susan and I were newly married, we were living in L.A. in a triplex in a dangerous part of town. I came home unexpectedly from a great distance at an hour Susan did not expect . . . it was 3:00 in the morning . . . she was sound asleep dreaming her dreams. I had been driving all night. I had been through a crisis and I just *missed* her so much. I *wanted* her. (I *want* the people I love.)

I tried desperately not to startle her because I knew she would be afraid there alone. But trying not to startle a person at 3:00 in the morning is all the more entering like a thief in the night. I remember thinking, if only I could enter her dreams and whisper, “Honey, it’s me. I’m coming home. And I’m coming in like a thief in the night, but it’s *me* and I’ll waken you soon.” But I couldn’t do that.

I worked at the lock; the keys jiggled in my hand. And I heard a voice of absolute terror from the other room. “Is somebody there? Who is it! Oh my God who is it?” And I knew in that moment that my bride was absolutely convinced that whoever it was who had those keys and entered through that door had absolute control over her and would rape her.

Rape is stolen sovereignty.

I remember thinking, if only I could have entered her dreams and said, “Honey . . . sweetheart . . . I will never rape you. My greatest desire is to make love to you. I am your husband. So awake, my love. And I will give you life.”

You see, I don’t say that last part to be cute. I say it because it’s the gospel. The only “if” in all the book of Revelation belongs to the bride of Christ. Don’t you see it? He says, “I will not rape you, but I long to love you. If you will only surrender, I will impregnate you with life.”

His love is life.

Well, I didn’t have all that figured out at 3:00 in the morning when she freaked out, but I do remember that after I calmed her down and she realized it was me, I received a pretty great welcome that night!

You see, this is a mystery. Jesus has been veiled, for we have sinned and dreamed our own sovereignty. But listen closely: Jesus has also been veiled according to God’s sovereign plan.

- That God might unveil to us His glory,
- That we might see the road that leads nowhere,
- That we might glimpse over the edge of the abyss,
- That we might taste, or at least smell, the scent of hell,
- That we might dream the insane dream of our own sovereignty . . .

. . . and then *wake up!* to His glory with a knowledge into which the angels long to look, the knowledge of the grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

“He consigned all men to disobedience,” writes Paul in Romans 11, “that he might have mercy on all.” You see, I believe in The Revelation we will find out that we The Church sing a song that nobody else knows! The *angels* don’t know it, the *demons* don’t know it, the beasts around the throne don’t know it, but we know it.

It’s the song of the Lamb, the new song, and it infuriates the Ancient Dragon, for it is the grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. By it he is defeated.

It’s why the Dragon hates all the children of the woman in chapter 12. It’s why human life is so sacred, for we can know the glory of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, and we can become vessels for that very glory, which is Christ in us. In Christ we conquer. He *gives* it to us in grace.

He doesn't *need* us; He wants us, so thoroughly and completely, that he died and rose. We are *wanted* by God.

In this whole abortion debate, I think that's the number one thing we forget—What does *God* want? What is *God* doing? Does *God* hurt? Does *God* ache? Does *God* care? Why would we forget Him? It's the dream of our own sovereignty.

Last week I ended with my favorite poem. This week I want to end with my favorite story. It's written by Walter Wangerin. As you listen, see if you can figure out who is speaking and to whom he is speaking.

I love a child. But she is afraid of me. I want to help this child, so terribly in need of help. . . . She is retarded, if the truth be told . . . slow in her mind, yet aware of her infirmity and embarrassed by it. . . .

She is lonely all the day long. She sits in a chair with her back to the door, her knees tucked tight against her breasts, her arms around these, her head down. . . . She's hiding. . . . She sings a sort of song to pass the time, a childish melody, though she is a woman in her body by its shape, a swelling at her belly. She sings, "Puss, puss." I know the truth, that she is singing of no cat at all, but of her face, sadly, calling it ugly. And I know the truth that she is right. But I am mightily persuasive myself, and I could make it lovely by my love alone. I love the child. But she is afraid of me.

Then how can I come to her, to feed and to heal her by my love? Knock on the door? Enter the common way? No. She holds her breath at a gentle tap, pretending that she is not home And should I break down the door? Or should I show my face at the window? Oh, what terrors I'd cause then. These have happened before. She's suffered the rapings of kindless men, and therefore she hangs her head

I am none of these, to be sure. But if I came the way that they have come, she would not know me different. She would not receive my love [surrender to my love], but might likely die of a failed heart. I've called from the hall. I've sung her name through cracks in the plaster. But I have a bright trumpet of a voice, and she covers her ears and weeps. She thinks each word an accusation.

I could, of course, ignore the doors and walls and windows, simply appearing before her as I am. I have that capability. But she hasn't the strength to see it and would die. She is, you see, her own deepest hiding place, and fear and death are the truest doors against me.

Then what is left? How can I come to my beloved? Where's the entrance that will not frighten nor kill her? By what door can love arrive after all, truly to nurture her, to take the loneliness away, to make her beautiful, as lovely as my moon at night, my sun come morning?

I know what I will do. I'll make the woman herself my door—and by her body enter in her life. Ah, I like that. I like that. However could she be afraid of her own flesh, of something lowly underneath her ribs? I'll be the baby waking in her womb. Hush: she'll have the time, this way, to know my coming first before I come. Hush: time to get ready, to touch her tummy, touching the promise alone, as it were. When she hangs her head,

she shall be looking at me, thinking of me, loving me while I gather in the deepest place of her being. It is an excellent plan! Hush.

And then, when I come, my voice shall be so dear to her. It shall call the tenderness out of her soul and loveliness into her face. And when I take milk at her breast, she'll sigh and sing another song, a sweet Magnificat, for she shall feel important then . . . !

Then what of her loneliness? Gone. Gone in the bond between us, though I shall not have said a word yet. And for my sake she shall wash her face, for she shall have a reason then. And the sins that she suffered, the hurts at the hands of men, shall be transfigured by my being: I make good come out of evil; I am the good come out of evil. I am her Lord, who loves this woman.

And for a while I'll let her mother me. But then I'll grow. And I will take my trumpet voice again, which once would kill her. And I'll take her, too, into my arms. And out of that little room, that filthy tenement, I'll bear my mother, my child, alive forever. I love a child. But she will not fear me for long, now.

Look! Look, it is almost happening. I am doing a new thing—and don't you perceive it? I am coming among you, a baby. And my name shall be Emmanuel.

And He said, "Whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me." But, you see, it's much more than that. I think that we *are* that woman. We, the people of God, *are* the woman in Revelation 12. And Christ is born in *us*, and among us and to us and through us, whispering, "Surrender, my people. Surrender to my love."

We are wanted *so much* that Christ came to us in a baby and died for us on a cross, and rose from the dead.

God has put all creation under His control,
He has sent His very Spirit,
Born into the hearts of His people,
Even the very last and the very least,
Drawing love out of us,
Drawing us into His kingdom,
Drawing us into His love,
That we would surrender and hear His whisper:
"Awake, O sleeper, and I will give you life."

"John! John! It's me—Jesus. I was born in Bethlehem. And I met you that day you were fishing in Galilee, remember? John, it's me—Jesus. You laid your head on my chest at supper, you listened to my heartbeat and I whispered in your ear of this day, John.

"John, I asked you to come pray with me, and you were so sleepy. I was praying about this day, John, sleepy-head John. You saw me die. John, *I* am the living one. *I* hold the keys. I am in control, so don't fear, John. Get up."

And one day I think you'll feel a hand on your shoulder, and you'll hear the voice that created the worlds and the galaxies say something like this: "Hey, it's *me*. It's *me*. I was singing to you through your mom, remember? You met me in Denver, remember? I was with you on the couch those nights when you were so scared. I was there. So don't be afraid. Because I hold the keys of death and hell, and now it's time to get up. It's time to live."

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One. I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hell.

"Lord Jesus, we thank You that it's *You*, and that if we've surrendered our lives to You, it's *been* you, our friend. And we know You, just not *all* of You. We thank You, Lord Jesus, that it's You. If it's *anyone* or *anything*, Lord Jesus, we thank You that it's *You* who holds the keys.

"We thank You that it's *You* who are in control, because that means that our sufferings are not in vain, but You use them. And this life is not in vain, but you *use* it. This world is not in vain, but You have transformed and used it, that on that day when You say, 'Get up sleepy-head,' we will wake up and say, 'Oh! I'm so glad it's *You!*' Thank You.

"Now, Lord Jesus, it's Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, and I would imagine there are some here who have had an abortion. Some have paid for an abortion. . . ."

If that's you, it may be that you have been running from the voice, for you think the voice only speaks words of accusation, but I'm saying *stop* and surrender; and you will see that the words are words of love. If you surrender, He takes *that*, even *that*, no—*especially* that, and turns it to His glory.

You do know that the Apostle Paul was a murderer,
and it was turned to glory—part of the plan.
You do know that King David was a rapist *and* a murderer,
yet he was a man after God's own heart.

Why? Because of *that*? No, because he *surrendered* it.

You surrender, and everything is transformed into the glory of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. The Dragon tempts you to take your own life to pay for your own sin. Don't you dare do it. You *can't* do it. You see, that's seizing control from the living God. Surrender it, and He gives you life.

Listen . . . He says, "Surrender, my love. Wait. It's almost time. I'll be waking you soon. I give you life." To surrender means that you say, in a moment, "God save me! Save me Lord God in Jesus who died for me. Save me! I surrender, and I want You to be my Lord. I surrender to *You* as Lord. That means I'll do whatever You want me to do. Because I trust You."

He knows you will screw up, but Jesus died for you. That's surrender. And then I have some news for you: You are saved.

Every where,
Every when, and
Every how.

I'm not making this up . . . this is the Bible: "All things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ's is God's." That's pretty safe. Amen.

© 2001 Peter Hiett