**Revelation 1:1-8**

I. The context of Revelation

A. These early Christians were living in the “in-between times”

1. = between the two victories of Christ (Resurrection and Second Coming)

2. But in the in between times they were experiencing pressure from the Roman Empire, and that pressure probably felt more real than Christ’s victories

B. We also live in the “in-between times”

1. Sometimes the pressures of life and the pressures of the culture feel much more real than the victories of Jesus

2. Examples of cultural pressure: what success looks like, what beauty looks like, what sexuality looks like, what truth looks like

C. Revelation was written to remind us of the victories of Jesus both at his first coming and especially at his second coming. Revelation pulls back the curtain on our daily lives to show us the spiritual realities behind the scenes so that we can live each day in light of Christ’s past and future victories.

D. Today’s passage: pulls back the curtain on who we are and gives us an identity based on God’s view of us = royal priests

II. A kingdom of priests (v. 6. See also Rev 5:9-10)

A. Background: Genesis 19:4-6

1. God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt to make them a kingdom of priests

2. Likewise, Jesus rescued us from slavery to our sins to make us a kingdom of priests

B. This is an image of belonging

1. We belong to God

a. “You are my treasured possession” = you belong to me in a unique way

b. “a holy nation” = you are set apart as my special people

c. Priests looked different, smelled different, had access to different places. All of this would have reminded the people that they were set apart and belonged to God and his service in a unique way.

2. God belongs to us

a. Dt 18:1-2: While all the other tribes received land as an inheritance, the priestly tribe of Levi did not: God himself was their inheritance

b. This created more insecurity from a human perspective (no security of land), but also the potential for trusting God Himself to provide for them

C. But it is an image of belonging to God for the sake of the world

1. Priests were dedicated to service of God for the sake of Israel. They led Israel in her worship of God. They were mediators between God and the people

2. Israel’s role as God’s holy nation was that they would be a light to the Gentiles

III. Living with this identity in mind

A. The churches in Revelation needed to be reminded of their identity as priests

1. In the midst of the intense pressure to conform to Roman religion and society, John was reminding them: “Don’t forget whose you are! You belong to God! You are set apart for him. Don’t compromise, don’t give in.”

2. He points to the cross (v. 5): Jesus purchased you and freed you from your sins: you belong to him.

3. He points them to the second coming (v. 7): When Jesus returns, you want to be found set apart for him and remaining faithful to him

B. We need to be reminded of our identity as priests

1. In those places where we are feeling the pressure of the culture, we need to be reminded of who we belong to

a. In a culture pushing its version of success that puts a pressure on us, we need to be reminded that the culture’s n don’t own us, Jesus does.

b. In a culture pressuring us to be beautiful/young in every way, we can find our identity in the fact that Jesus loves us exactly as we are

c. In a culture tempting us with sexually explicit messages, we need to be reminded that our body does not belong to ourselves but to the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

d. In social settings where we want to fit in and appear cool to our friends and co-workers, we need to be reminded that we don’t need their approval because we belong to Jesus and have what we need in him.

2. See 1 Peter 2:9-12

C. John is reminding us of our identity, which goes deeper than morality

1. Morality = do the right thing (it is often motivated by guilt and obligation, and it is often done in our own human willpower)

2. Identity = be who you are (it is motivated by gratitude for what Christ has made us, and it is done by faith)

IV. Conclusion

A. The more we live out our identity as priests, the more the cultural pressure will increase

B. The basic question Revelation poses is this: Will we deny our identity to release the pressure, or will we live out our identity in the midst of the pressure?

**Discussion Questions**

1. On Sunday we discussed our identity as priests in this world. What about that image was most helpful for you, or what about Sunday’s discussion on that was a new idea for you?

2. On Sunday the following statement was made: “Identity goes deeper than morality.” What do you think was meant by that, and how might that impact how you live (for further detail, see point III. C. above)?

3. What is one specific area in your life where you need to be reminded that you are a priest who belongs to God (See point I.B.2 for a few examples)? What would it look like to embrace that identity more fully in that area of your life?

4. Read together 1 Peter 2:9-12. What phrase stands out to you that is most encouraging (or convicting)?