

The Revelation of Jesus Christ
(Sermon 1 - Intro and Overview)
9.1.24

Please turn in your Bibles to the Book of Revelation, chapter 1. The very last book in the NT.

Did you ever flip to the back of a book to see how it ended? I never liked to do that, spoiled the journey. Or when you record the big game, and you don't want to know how it ends, and someone blurts out the score and ruins it for you.

Well the Bible is not like that. It's good to flip to the back and see how the story ends. It's been called the most difficult book of the Bible to understand. And for that reason, one of the most neglected books. While it can be intimidating and humbling, the Book of Revelation is actually one of the most beautiful, powerful, encouraging Books in God's word.

In these pages, Jesus is pleased to reveal His will to us, His character and nature, and to reveal His plan that one day, He will return to judge the world, defeat evil, and set up His eternal reign as God and King.

So even as we start this series, let me jump to the end and tell you what happens: Jesus wins. Jesus wins! And that is what I want you to hold to. That's the big reveal that we need to keep in mind as we journey through this Book.

In the middle of all the symbols and numbers and battles and beasts, we're not looking for timelines and charts. We're not going to get bogged down in detailed debates of what happens when. That's not ultimately what Revelation is about. It is about Jesus, our Victorious King, ruling and reigning over all.

Our Approach

Now, with that in mind, let me give you the plan for today. As we do with every Book of the Bible we preach through, we first need to understand who wrote it, who it was written to and their context, why it was written, and how we are to apply it today to our lives.

Let's start by reading the first three verses, the prologue of the Book, which also serves as a blueprint of the message today. Let's read Rev. 1:1-3, and then we'll pray.

[1:1] The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, [2] who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. [3] Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

(PRAY)

When a person thinks about the book of Revelation, some common questions come to mind:

- When will Jesus return?
- What is the rapture?
- What is the Millennium?
- Who is the Antichrist, and what is the mark of the Beast?

These are good questions, but they are not the primary questions we should start with. Because that's not what the Book of Revelation is about.

So...

I. WHAT IS REVELATION ALL ABOUT?

(Rev. 1:1a) - The revelation of Jesus Christ...

The very first word in this Book is literally, "apokalypsis" = the Greek word for revelation, an uncovering of something hidden, pulling back the curtain on what was previously unseen, making known something that can not be revealed by human wisdom.

The Book of Revelation deals with hidden wisdom, hidden mysteries of God having to do with things past, present and future, that could only be revealed by God Himself.

Now, it's important to understand we all bring biases to the table. We can all bring a certain disposition, or our favorite interpretation or ideas to this Book. Among theologians, there are four main camps in how Revelation is interpreted:

-Some approach Revelation as kind of a road map for the future, that everything mentioned in Revelation is all yet to happen. They are called “**futurists**”.

-On the other hand, there are some who believe that all the events in Revelation have already happened in the 1st century – it’s all in the past. They are “**preterists**”, meaning past.

-Some think Revelation is more like an illustration or allegory that represent different stages of church history. They are the “**historicists**”.

-Yet another approach called the “**idealist**” says none of Revelation is to be taken literally, that it’s all symbolic, and represents general spiritual principles for us to learn.

Now you may be wondering which viewpoint I lean toward. Actually, I don’t fit into any of those categories. Because I believe there are some things in Revelation that have already happened, and some things have yet to happen. I also believe some things in Revelation are literal, while a lot of other things are symbolic.

But wherever you land on that spectrum, that’s not as important right now. In fact, I want us to approach Revelation, as much as we can, without any preconceived notions, other than the clear conviction that this is God’s holy word, given to His people, so that we would be edified, and Jesus would be glorified.

Studying the Book of Revelation is kind of like looking at a painting. You can study it up close, looking intently at the brush strokes, the artist’s use of color, it’s style, etc. But if that’s all you do, you’ll miss the whole purpose of the painting – which is to step back, see the big picture, take it all in, and appreciate its beauty.

It has been said that’s one of the reasons studying Revelation is so daunting and so intimidating - because we come to it asking the wrong questions. We come to it asking the “how” and “when” of Jesus’ return.

Instead, we should be asking the “what” and “who” of Revelation. As we see here in verse 1, it is “the revelation of Jesus Christ”. That is the “who” – this Book is all about King Jesus. And the “what” of Revelation is worship. All creation worshiping Christ, our conquering King, and His supremacy over all things.

All through the Book, we will see singing and adoration and praise and worship. And our response in reading it should be the same – to be in awe and worship our Lord.

A Picture Book

Now, one could ask why did God make Revelation so mysterious? A revelation, in its simplest form, is a picture or series of pictures. That means this book of Revelation is a picture book, full of images. We live in a culture that loves visual aids, so this is good for us.

If you've ever read Revelation, you know it is full of symbols and symbolic meanings. Numbers are very important. For instance, we see the number 7 over and over. Seven represents completion. 7 churches, 7 plagues, 7 bowls, 7 trumpets. Even in the layout itself, there are 7 visions in the Book of Revelation.

And then you have some wild creatures – some creatures are completely bizarre, like 10 horns and 7 heads on one beast. Things that our imagination will have a hard time visualizing.

But we are not meant to try and visualize every symbol or description literally. Instead these are verbal pictures meant to convey an idea to be understood, not a graphic to be drawn in the mind.

“I have long since come to the conclusion that God does not intend his final word to the church to be intimidating. Revelation is a book for children! ... For just as children relate to pictures better than to words, so Revelation is a picture book designed to show as much as to relate...What the Gospels give in spoken form, Revelation gives in pictorial form.” ~Derek Thomas

Here's another way to think about it: In Matthew 16, Jesus said that He would build His Church, and the gates of Hell would not prevail against it. It's been said that if that statement in Matthew 16 was a still picture, then the Book of Revelation is the movie that plays it out.

But above all else, Revelation is a gospel book. It is a culmination of all biblical revelation. No book of the NT alludes to the OT more frequently. What began in Genesis, with creation, with the fall, with the struggle between good and evil, with the promise of the serpent's head being crushed and God redeeming creation - all of this comes to pass and is fulfilled in Revelation.

Now, this first phrase in the first verse, “The revelation **of** Jesus Christ”, tells us a few things:

-Christ **received** this revelation (It is a revelation given to Him by the Father)

-Christ **is** this revelation (Jesus Himself and His victory is what is being revealed)

-Christ **gave** this revelation (The revelation that came from Jesus, and was given, through an angel, to John, to write down.)

Jesus is the mediator and He is the message of this revelation. He received the mission from the Father. He fulfilled the mission and is coming again to establish His kingdom. And Jesus gave this message to His church to know and to celebrate. The Book of Revelation is all about Jesus.

Genre (kind or category of writing):

Now, what kind of letter is Revelation? Different books of the Bible are written in different forms. Some are poetry, some are epistles or letters to churches, some are historical accounts. Revelation has a little bit of all of these.

It’s officially categorized as “apocalyptic” literature because it is a revealing of something that was previously unknown or unrevealed before.

John also calls this book “prophecy” – not to be understood only as a prediction of the future, although there are future predictions in the Book. But “prophecy” in the sense that this is a message from God Himself – this is God’s word to His people.

Another category or term we will refer to is “eschatology”, or a study of the end times, or end things. When you think of Revelation, that’s usually the first thing you think of - “end times”. But we need to be careful how we define that. Just about every generation of Christians thought they were the last generation before Jesus returns. But the Bible defines “the end times” as the time between the first coming of Christ (baby in a manger) to the second coming of Christ (victorious King). So, in that way, we are living in the end times right now, and we have been for 2000 years.

Now, looking back at our text, the second part of verse 1 tells us why this was written:

[1] The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.

This prophecy is from God, given to his servants (His people, the Church).

Deut. 29 reminds us “The secret things belong to the LORD our God...” There are some things that only God knows, things we will not know or understand in this life. But Deut 29 continues, that “...the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

In God’s wisdom and His kindness toward us, He does reveal some things, some mysteries. The greatest mystery revealed is the mystery of the gospel, how God chose to redeem mankind by sending His only Son to die in our place, as our substitute. The full revelation of that mystery was hidden throughout the OT, God speaking through the Law and through the Prophets, hinting, pointing toward the Redeemer, who would be revealed in the NT, with Jesus, the Lord of Glory.

So, since God is the one doing the revealing, we need His help in understanding this Book. For instance, how we interpret that phrase in v. 1, “things that must soon take place”. As we’ve already seen, God’s timing is not our timing. “Soon” to us means next week. “Soon” to God could mean thousands of years.

But above all, the Book of Revelation is all about Jesus – His power, His majesty, and the foretelling of His final victory. God Himself is revealing it, and He is revealing it for the benefit His Church.

The second big question we want to ask...

II. WHO IS THE AUTHOR AND AUDIENCE OF REVELATION?

The last part of v. 1...

Rev. 1:1b-2 - He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, [2] who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

Author

So here we have the human author, the one who received this vision, identified simply as “John”. All the evidence points to this being John the Apostle, the disciple in Jesus’ inner circle. John wrote a total of 5 books of

the NT: the Gospel of John, the 3 epistles of 1st, 2nd and 3rd John, and the Book of Revelation.

Interestingly enough, John was also the only disciple who did not suffer a martyr's death. While all the other apostles had been murdered, John was exiled by the Romans to the island of Patmos. That's where John was when He wrote Revelation, between 90-95 AD, about 60 years after John walked with Jesus during His earthly ministry.

It was here on this isolated island that God gave John this series of extended and detailed visions revealing hidden things, some that would come to pass in John's lifetime, some that were yet to come, but all of which focus on the final victory and eternal reign of Christ.

Original Audience

Now, who was this book written to? The original audience was made up of seven different churches in seven different cities, located in Asia Minor, (modern day Turkey). We can see in the next couple of chapters that these cities are Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. These were real churches with real people.

Now why was this letter written to them? Well consider this: When Jesus completed His earthly ministry, He gave the gospel to the apostles and the early church to spread and make other disciples. They did. They believed. The church grew – not just numbers, but they grew in unity, in faith, in trusting in God, and in expectation of Christ's return, which some believed would be in their lifetime.

But He didn't return in their lifetime. And they faced trials and persecution. Rome promoted emperor worship, and in that, the government became increasingly hostile toward Christians. Some Christians remained faithful, even unto death. Others who claimed the name of Christ in the beginning, found their faith was shallow and without root under the heat of persecution. Some congregations flourished. Some withered and died.

These are the people that the Book of Revelation was originally intended for – Christians facing a hostile world, facing persecution, and in need of the reminder of the promise of Christ's ultimate victory.

“Revelation delivers to the distressed churches of Asia Minor and to the church in all ages, the triumphant assurance that behind the scenes of history, the kingdom of God is in power, and Jesus Christ the King of all kings is on his Father's throne executing his sovereign

judgment over the world...Though the church of Jesus Christ might seem despised and defeated, it is Jesus Christ who rules the kings of the earth, and his purposes are patiently being worked out here below.” ~ Dr. Charles Hill

That’s the encouragement to these struggling churches, those who were suffering and being persecuted, to hear the message that evil will not prevail, and that Jesus wins in the end!

The third big question we want to ask...

III. WHAT IS THE BREAKDOWN OF THE BOOK?

Now, let’s take a moment and do a fly over, a quick survey of the Book itself. (You don’t have to write all this down – I’ll make my notes available online.) In Rev. 1:19, we are given this helpful breakdown:

Rev. 1:19 – “Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.”

So, the Book of Revelation can be broken down into these 3 categories: The things which you “have seen”, the things which “are”, and the things which will take place “after this”.

A. The things which you “have seen” (The glorified Christ)

Ch. 1 - The glorified Christ

These are some of the verses we are covering today. And as we get into this chapter next week, we will see more of this first vision where John is shown the revealed glory of the Lord Jesus, and he receives the command to write out the visions to come. It’s here in chapter 1 we see Jesus as our Priest-King.

B. The things which “are” (The letters to the 7 churches in Asia)

Ch. 2-3

-7 different church congregations that the Lord Jesus Himself sends these messages to. Some churches are commended for their faithfulness, others are corrected for their lukewarm hearts or forgetting their first love.

-This section, with the letters to the 7 churches, is what we will be covering for the rest of the calendar year. We plan to do one sermon for each of the 7 churches mentioned. And for us, hearing directly from Jesus what He

rewards and what He condemns in these congregations will help us assess our own hearts and walk in greater obedience. And it's here in these chapters we see Jesus as the Judge of the Churches.

C. The things that are to take place “after this” (ch. 4-22)

Ch. 4 – A VISION OF HEAVEN

A magnificent picture of God's throne and people in heaven, worshipping around the throne of God. It's here in ch. 4 we see Jesus as Creator and Lord of all.

Ch. 5 – 16 is the section of THE JUDGE AND HIS JUDGMENTS

If you're reading through Revelation, this is where things can get confusing, dealing with different symbols and beasts and wars and judgments. For instance, in this section there are 3 cycles of 7 judgments – (7 seals broken, 7 trumpets blown, 7 bowls poured out).

But one thing that can help is realizing that these may not be 3 separate events, but the same judgment of God, poured out on the wicked, just looked at and described in 3 different ways, similar to the gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, describing the same events from different perspectives.

Breaking down this section even further:

Ch. 5–7 THE SEVEN SEALS (where we see the Lamb of God is also the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, worthy to open the seals of God's judgment)

Ch. 8-11 THE SEVEN TRUMPETS (The vision of Heaven, the throne of God, Lion / Lamb, angelic beings)

Ch. 12-14 SEVEN SIGNIFICANT SIGNS (woman and the dragon, war between Satan and the son of the woman, the mark of the beast, the harvest of the earth, etc.)

Ch. 15-16 SEVEN LAST PLAGUES AND SEVEN BOWLS (More judgments, including the battle of Armageddon). In these chapters we see Jesus as Redeemer and Lord of History.

Ch. 17-20 THE TRIUMPH OF THE LAMB (the 2nd coming of Christ, the fall of Babylon, Satan is bound, the great white throne judgment, the Millennial reign of Christ, the marriage supper of the Lamb, the final victory)

of Christ, great rejoicing in Heaven). Here we see Jesus as Conqueror and Victorious King.

Ch. 21-22 A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH (God is with His people, no more night, Christ has set up His eternal reign, where we will see Him face to face and live with Him forever). Here we see Jesus as the Bridegroom.

And all through Revelation, from beginning to end, we see Jesus as the Lamb who was slain, and the Lion who conquers.

Now, that brings us to the last big question we want to ask today...

IV. HOW IS REVELATION RELEVANT TODAY?

John was a faithful witness – He recorded what He “saw”. He describes the pictures he saw, even if some of those descriptions sound really strange to us.

And God gave this vision (or series of visions) to John – not for John’s personal edification, but to record, to write it down, so that it would be known by all of God’s people – those living in John’s time, as well as God’s people today.

God never intended for this Book of the Bible to be skipped over or dismissed as too complicated to understand, or too intimidating to read.

In fact, verse 3 gives us a beatitude, or a promise of blessing, the first of 7 such promises in the Book...

[1:3] Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

Why should we read this Book and preach through it? Because we are commanded to. But also because we are promised a blessing when we do.

And a blessing is promised to those who will hear, who will listen. And not only listen, but to keep these words, to keep the commands of Christ, to keep Christ at the center of our lives, to anticipate His coming, knowing that “the time is near”.

That's why I don't believe we should approach Revelation as a timeline to dissect and chart. Some have used these charts to preach with great certainty when each of these events will happen, as if they know for sure, which I think minimizes Revelation to some kind of scientific formula.

That is not what God intends for the Book of Revelation. Instead, God included this Book of the Bible so that we would see Jesus, to be encouraged, to be in awe, to worship the One True King, and to joyfully anticipate His return.

Eschatology is important. We should study what the Bible says about the end times. But, because apocalyptic literature is so full of symbolism and allegory, there are parts of this Book that are not as clear as others, parts that faithful Christians can disagree on the interpretation.

So, Christians should study end-time events, but we should not let it divide us. Too many Christians confuse primary and secondary issues in our faith. One person's eschatology must not be seen as a primary doctrine and therefore it must not divide us.

We can disagree on the timing and interpretation of the events in this Book. We can disagree on the identity of the Anti-Christ, on the idea of the rapture, we can disagree on the definition of the Millennium, and a host of other things up for interpretation, and still love one another and serve together in the same church, and still be faithful to God's Word.

So, as we walk through this book, I will try to be clear on what is clear. And I will try to hold loosely what is not clear.

And here's what is clear, what we know for sure:

- The longer we live, evil is going to increase.
- World governments will grow in power and in wickedness.
- Satan will increase his attempts to destroy God's people.
- One day, God's wrath will be poured out.
- One day Christ will return in victory.

He will set up His kingdom forever. And when He does, we will be with Him forever. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes. There will be no more sin, no more sickness, no more death, no more pain, no more persecution. Only perfect peace and inexpressible joy and love and hope and worship of the One who redeemed us. That's what we know for sure, and that is what we stand upon.

So, to answer the question, the Book of Revelation is relevant for us today because Jesus is still our hope. In a world full of chaos and uncertainty, we need to be reminded now more than ever that Jesus Christ has won the victory.

And that's why we've titled this series, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ". It is the story of the victory of Jesus Christ, a victory that was secured – not on an apocalyptic battlefield fighting a beast, but on a Roman cross defeating our sin. That's where Jesus won the battle. The Lamb was slain for our sin.

And one day He will return as the Lion, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Conquering King who will lay low His enemies, rescue His people, and set up His Kingdom forever.

Conclusion

Through this revelation of Jesus, may God better prepare us to suffer, to faithfully endure. May he lift our gaze and our affection off of the things of this world and onto the things that are above, upon Christ and His righteousness.

And through His Word, may He grant us a deeper love and a greater worship of Jesus - the One who came and died for us, and the One who is coming again.

(Let's Pray)