

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

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Bible Text: Revelation 1:1-3

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Revelation chapter one. We will be reading this evening the first three verses of this chapter.

As you know, for some time we have been studying together the book of Genesis and last week we completed Genesis 36 and Genesis 37 begins to pick up for us the life of Joseph. It cuts off from Jacob and turns to the life of Joseph. And since it... we have been dealing with the book of Genesis for some time, it seemed appropriate, then, for us to take a break for some time from the book of Genesis and to turn our attention now the book of Revelation.

And so this evening we read the first three verses of Revelation chapter one.

Let us give our attention now to the Word of our God.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.¹

So far the reading of God's own Word.

People of God, as I mentioned a moment ago, tonight we begin a new series on the book of Revelation, the final book of the Bible. And as we begin that series it is well for us to ask the question: Why a series on Revelation? Why turn our attention to this last and final book of the Bible?

And I suppose we could give any number of reasons, but let me list at least a couple of reasons why I think it is appropriate for us to turn our attention to this great and magnificent book. As you well know, we have been studying the book of Genesis for

¹ Revelation 1:1-3.

some time. And as we turn our attention to the book of Revelation we begin to see that there are many connections, many connections between Genesis, the first book of the Bible and Revelation, the last book of the Bible.

Indeed, many of the great and major themes of Scripture which are found in Genesis reach their climax and their fulfillment in the book of Revelation. So then it is safe to say that we cannot properly understand the beginning apart from the end, nor can we properly understand the end apart from the beginning. That is to say we cannot properly understand Genesis apart from Revelation and we cannot properly understand Revelation apart from Genesis.

And should, by the grace of God we grow in our knowledge of the book of Genesis as well as in our knowledge in the book of Revelation, then certainly we shall grow also in our knowledge of all that which lies between and that, indeed, I pray, shall be profitable for us as the body of Christ.

And so for its connection with the book of Genesis, it seems fitting for us now to turn our attention to the book of Revelation. It seems fitting for another reason as well. There has been in the last number of years a renewed interest not only in the end times but a renewed interest in the book of Revelation.

This, no doubt, is largely the result of the Y2K hysteria that swept our land in recent years. And though the hysteria of Y2K has quickly gone by, the interest which it has promoted in the book of Revelation has not quickly waned. Indeed, just recently I consulted a Christian book catalog to see how many books there were advertised on the book of Revelation and I counted no less than 26 books written on the book of Revelation or on the end times.

In our days, just recently, there have been movies produced on this book. There have been a whole host of books written on the book of Revelation, both fictional novels and theological. There is, then, a renewed interest in the book of Revelation in our day.

Sadly, however, even with this renewed interest in the book of Revelation, there has not been much written on the book of Revelation from a reformed standpoint. Indeed, apart from the classic work of William Hendrickson entitled *More than Conquerors* and apart from the series of sermons by Herman Hoeksma entitled *Behold He Cometh*, there is simply not much written from a reformed standpoint on the book of Revelation.

And so it seems fitting for us to study this great and magnificent book.

Those are just a few of the reasons. I am sure we could number many, many more. But it is good and it is fitting and it is proper for us to turn our attention to this book.

Now there have been many who have argued that the book of Revelation is a book that has been written for the encouragement of the persecuted Church, that it has been written not only for the encouragement of the persecuted Church, but that it has been written also

to provide comfort for suffering Christians. And, certainly, the book of Revelation is that. It is a great encouragement to the persecuted Church. It is a great comfort for suffering Christians. But it is far more than that.

It is, indeed, by the grace of God, a book that affects our understanding. It is a book that affects our understanding of God, a book that affects our understanding of Christ, a book that affects our understanding of ourselves, of mankind, a book that affects our understanding of life and of reality, a book that affects our understanding of the world in which we live.

And as this book affects our understanding, it affects also our behavior.

Indeed, by the grace of God, it is a book that transforms us.

And so we turn our attention this evening to the first three verses of Revelation chapter one. In the first place note the title of the book. It is given there in verse one.

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ.”²

In the original Greek it is given the title: *αποκαλυψις ιησου χριστου*, the apocalypse of Jesus Christ. And that Greek word “apocalypse” is important. In Greek it literally means an unveiling, an opening, a revelation. I say that is important because as we turn to the book of Revelation we are struck by the number of strange and difficult things that confront us in this book.

If you have any familiarity with the book of Revelation you know that in this book we read of such strange things as the four living creatures, those creatures with six wings, with eyes covered about them. We read of such strange things as those four living creatures. We read of the horsemen of the apocalypse. We read of the 144,000 that are sealed. We read of the number of man and the number of the beast which is 666. We read of the beast out of the earth, a beast out of the sea. We read of the fall of Babylon the Great. We read of a kingdom of God being established. We read of the devil being cast into an abyss for 1000 years. We read of a new Jerusalem.

Strange and difficult things confront us in the book of Revelation. And yet it is a book that is called an apocalypse, an unveiling, an opening, a revelation.

This book is not there, beloved, to confuse us. It is not there to hide the truth from us. It is not there to conceal the truth. On the contrary, the book of Revelation is there to open the truth to us, to unveil the truth, to reveal the truth. It is there of the Church of Jesus Christ that we might grow in our knowledge and our love of the Lord Jesus Christ, that we might grow in our obedience to him. It is there for the edification of God’s people and for the glory of God’s name.

² Revelation 1:1.

Now sometimes we turn to the book of Revelation and think that it is a book that plots out for us all the events of the end times, that it is a book that simply tells us the order of events that will transpire prior to Christ's second coming. But that is not really what the book of Revelation is all about. That development of the end times, that plotting of the end times is given to us in other places of Scripture. It is given to us, for example, in Matthew 24 as Jesus delivers the Olivet Discourse. It is given to us, also, in the books, in the letters to the Thessalonians. And that lot line, as you well know it, is rather simple.

Christ has come and in his first coming he has inaugurated his kingdom. He has died on the cross. He has been buried in the grave. He has been raised up from the dead and ascended on high to the right hand of God the Father. And even as Christ has inaugurated that kingdom we now find the increase of wickedness upon the face of the earth. And, indeed, we are living in such times as we see the greatness of the increase of wickedness all about us.

We learn on the basis of Matthew 24 and on the basis of the letters to the Thessalonians that that wickedness will continue to increase, that it will continue to increase until the revelation of antichrist, the great antichrist crisis shall come about. And only after that shall Christ return and the clouds of glory to judge the living and the dead and to establish his everlasting and eternal kingdom, the new heavens and the new earth.

That is a plot line that is given to us in Mathew 24 and in the book of the letters of the Thessalonians. The book of Revelation does not add to that plotline, nor does it take away from it.

So our purpose, then in turning to the book of Revelation is not to simply begin to ask ourselves: Where are we at in the time line? Do we find ourselves in the midst of the third bowl or in the midst of the second trumpet or in the midst of the next thing of God's work and of God's acts?

That is not the questions that we are to be asking as we come to the book of Revelation. It is not so much a plot line. It is rather an unveiling, an unveiling of heaven itself, an opening of heaven itself, a revealing of the very throne room of the living God. It is a book, beloved which ushers us up into the very throne room of God, into his presence to see the glories of heaven and to hear the things of heaven. It is a book that unveils to us the very presence of the living God. Its purpose is to open heaven for us.

Yes, beloved, there is another world above this world, a better world, a greater world, the glorious world of heaven itself.

And this is what the book of Revelation opens to our eyes and to our ears.

We read this evening for our call to worship from Psalm 48.

“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain,”³
Mount Zion.

The end of Psalm 48 commands the psalmist, commands those who read such words and who hear such words to walk about Zion, to counter ramparts, to counter palaces, to recognize that God is there in the midst of her.

Psalm 48 commands God’s people to take a tour of Zion, as it were. And this is what the book of Revelation does for us. It gives to us a tour of Zion. It opens heaven to our eyes. It opens the glories of the world to come to our ears. And by its vivid imagery and by its beautiful language, it grips us. It surrounds us and it draws us in. It draws us up into the heavenly places, as it were. It, indeed, causes us to set our minds on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of the majesty on high.

For it is the Revelation, the unveiling of Jesus Christ.

Yes, note that word in the title for a moment.

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ.”⁴

For years commentators have gone back and forth trying to understand exactly what this means. And it seems that there are two options.

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ.”⁵

There are those who say that Jesus Christ is the one who reveals, that he is the one who gives this book, that he is the one who reveals the things of this book. It is the revelation of Jesus Christ.

But there are others who would maintain that it is not so much Jesus Christ who reveals, but that it is Jesus Christ who is revealed.

You think, for example, of the latter half of Revelation chapter one where we are encountered with the glorious revelation of Jesus Christ. Clearly he is the one who is revealed. And so which is it? Is Jesus the one who reveals or is Jesus the one who is revealed?

Well, we need not opt for one or the other. It seems to me that both are true. Jesus Christ is both the one who is revealed and he is the one who does the revealing.

As I mentioned a moment ago here in chapter one we find that Jesus Christ is the one who is revealed. But as you turn to Revelation chapter five, as we are ushered up into the very throne room of God we find the apostle John weeping. We find him weeping there

³ Psalm 48:1.

⁴ Revelation 1:1.

⁵ Ibid.

in Revelation chapter five because there is a little scroll, a scroll which no one in heaven, no one on earth, no one under the earth is worthy or able to open. And so John weeps.

But then we come to Revelation five verse five and we learn that, indeed, the lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed, the root of David has prevailed. He is worthy to open that scroll and open that scroll he does. And from Revelation five verse five onwards the entire book of Revelation is the unfolding of that little scroll.

Jesus then is the one who reveals. You see, then the chain of revelation that is given to us in verse one.

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John.”⁶

God the Father gives the revelation to Jesus Christ the Son. Jesus Christ the Son gives the revelation to his angel and his angel gives the revelation to John. John then is the recipient of this revelation.

Now what is remarkable to note in the opening verse of Revelation is the similarity between this opening verse and the opening verses of the prophets.

We have not the time this evening to compare and to contrast the opening of the book of the Revelation with the opening of the books of the prophets, but as you do so you note that there is a striking resemblance, a striking similarity. This letter of revelation begins in the same way that many of the prophets begin and that is significant.

For who are the prophets? Who are the prophets of the Old Testament? Boys and girls, if I were to ask you who were the prophets or what is a prophet, I am sure that you would probably tell me that the prophets are the ones who could tell the future. They are the ones that could tell what would come to pass before it came to pass. And, indeed, the prophets were that. They were men who were able to tell the future. But they were much more than that. The prophets were the very messengers of God himself, the very heralds of God himself, the very ones who would bring God’s own Word. God would place his Word in the mouth of the prophet.

You recall such things, for example, from Isaiah chapter six where Isaiah receives his call. You remember. There he is in the throne room of God. He sees the Christ high and exalted, the train of his robe fills the temple. And the temple shakes with the presence of God. There are angels all about crying out, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts.”⁷

And do you remember Isaiah’s response?

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Isaiah 6:3.

“Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts.”⁸

And God says to Isaiah, “You shall speak my word.”

And he sends an angel with a live coal to touch the lips of Isaiah and he purifies Isaiah’s lips and he places his word in Isaiah’s mouth that Isaiah may go forth to bring the word of the living God.

Much the same thing happens in the opening chapters of Jeremiah where Jeremiah also has his mouth touched by the hand of the living God, that God might place his Word in Jeremiah’s mouth.

The prophets, then, were not only the messengers of God, but they stood as the very mouthpiece of God, the very ones who would bring God’s Word, the very ones who would speak on God’s behalf, the very ones who would bring the living Word of God to his people.

Now, in order for the prophets to speak the Word of God it was necessary for them to come into contact with God. And remarkably this is precisely what we find. The prophets were those who were ushered up into the very presence of the living God.

We spoke just a moment ago of Isaiah in Isaiah chapter six being ushered into the very throne room of the living God. He is ushered in to the very throne room of God there to see the glories of God, there to hear the very deliberations of God himself. With his eyes he sees the glories of heaven. With his ears he hears the glorious things of heaven. He is ushered into the very presence of God. God brings him up into heaven. He unveils heaven to them. He opens heaven to them. He reveals heaven to them. And he commissions them to go forth, to bring that word, to proclaim the things that they have seen, the proclaim the things that they have heard, to proclaim the Word of the living God.

And as you can well imagine, such an experience in the life of the prophet was a life altering experience. The prophets could not be ushered into the throne room of God and remain the same. How could they see the glories of heaven and remain the same? How could they hear of the glories of heaven and remain the same? It was a life altering experience. It changed them forever.

And so it was for the apostle John. John was ushered up into the very throne room of God, into the very counsel chambers of God. Heaven was unveiled to John. Heaven was opened to John. Heaven was revealed to John and John could not be the same again.

The very Word of God would be put in John’s mouth. He would be commanded to eat that scroll that the Word of God might be ingested by him. And John himself would be transformed by that Word.

⁸ Isaiah 6:5.

The Lord willing, in a number of weeks we shall look at that great and glorious vision of John chapter one, or of Revelation chapter one.

If you have your Bibles open yet, look at that vision for a moment with me in verse 10. John writes:

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead.⁹

John saw the risen and exalted Christ, the Christ shining in his glory as the sun shines in the fullness of his strength.

Beloved, think of that for a moment. What a vision was there before John's eyes. Words fell in comparison to what John saw. We cannot bear to even glance at the sun for more than a couple of moments. To behold the sun shining in the fullness of its strength would strike us blind. But now John sees something that far surpasses the sun shining in its strength. He sees the risen and exalted Christ. He sees the glory of the living God. And he falls at his feet as a dead man.

What John is about to see, what John is about to hear will transform John. He will never, never be the same again.

You think of the last words of the book of Revelation, those last words of Revelation chapter 22 where John records the words of the living Christ in verse 20 where Jesus says, "Surely I am coming quickly."¹⁰

And how does John respond?

"Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."¹¹

⁹ Revelation 1:10-17.

¹⁰ Revelation 22:20.

¹¹ Ibid.

John has been transformed by what he has seen. John has been transformed by what he has heard. This revelation that he writes down in this book under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit has affected John's understanding. It has affected his understanding of God.

In Revelation four and five he shall give a great and glorious description of the throne room of the living God, the sovereign God, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, the great Creator of all things.

Don't think that John's understanding of God will be left unaffected. What John is about to see, what John is about to hear, shall affect his understanding of Christ. We just read of the vision of the risen and exalted Christ, how John fell at his feet as a dead man.

Don't think that John's understanding of Christ will be left unaffected. John's understanding of mankind will be affected. He will see that God is sovereign over the affairs of man, that though the nations rage and the people's plot a vain a thing, God sits on this throne in the heavens and he laughs them to derision.

Don't think that John's understanding of man will be left unaffected. John's understanding of this world will be affected. He will understand that there is a greater world, a better world. And having tasted of the glories of that world, John prays with fervency.

"Bring it about, Lord Jesus. Yes, come quickly and usher me into that world, that better world."

It is, beloved, a message that shall transform John. John will never be the same again.

And dear Church of Jesus Christ, even as it is a message that will transform John, so it is a message that by the grace of God will transform the Church.

Look at what John writes in verses two and three. It says that John:

...who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.¹²

This vision was not meant only to transform John, but to transform you, to transform me, to transform the Church, to give to us a new understanding, a new understanding of God, a new understanding of God, a new understanding of Christ, a new understanding of ourselves, a new understanding of this world in which we live.

Beloved, as we hear the things that were spoken in the throne room of God, we shall be changed. As we see the things of heaven unfolded in our sight, revealed before us, opened

¹² Revelation 1:2-3.

to us, we shall be changed. Having seen heaven, we cannot be the same. Having heard the things of heaven we cannot be the same. Nothing, nothing will be the same again. We will look at death differently. We will see death to be what it is, a powerless thing, a powerless thing that only serves to put an end to our sinning and to usher us in to the glory of the world to come. And we, yes, we shall hear that blessing.

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord [for they] rest from their labors, and their works follow them.”¹³

Having seen the things of heaven we cannot look at death the same again. That is why we weep. But we weep as those who have hope. And having seen the things of this book, beloved, we look at suffering differently. Oh, we may suffer for a time here, but these sufferings are light. These sufferings are momentary. There is a greater glory that awaits us. The weight of glory is upon us as the apostle Paul will say.

Indeed, we even shall look at the pleasures of this world differently. For what are the pleasures that this world affords compared with the glories of the world to come?

Yes, beloved, this book by the grace of God shall transform us. It shall change us. It shall change our understanding of all things. It shall change our understanding of reality.

So often, beloved, we live our lives as though this world is all there is, as though there is nothing less, as though there are nothing more, as though this world were it.

You know, it used to be said of Christians that they were so heavenly minded that they were no earthly good. In our day that is no longer a danger. Indeed, the danger for us is that we have become so earthly minded that we are no heavenly good.

But, beloved, this is a book that grips us, a book that pulls us in to the glories of the world to come, a book that tells us that there is a better world, a book that sets our minds on the things above, a book that indeed tells us that this is reality, not the reality that we see in the shadow lands of this world, but the reality is this. There is a throne in heaven and Christ sits upon that throne and Christ sits upon that throne and Christ reigns forever and ever. And to that king and to that kingdom we belong.

And so, beloved, the book of Revelation stands before us as the marching orders for the Church, as it were, marching orders which command us not to compromise our heavenly citizenship by joining hands with this world to make life in this world a little bit easier, a little bit more pleasurable, a little bit more satisfying. No, the book of Revelation gives its marching orders to the church.

Oftentimes we think that the church is to do little more than sit around, just sit around and hope that the gates of hell shall not prevail against us. But the book of Revelation gives to the church a different command. The book of Revelation commands the church not to sit back hoping that the gates of hell shall not prevail against us. The book of Revelation

¹³ Revelation 14:13.

commands the Church to go forth, to bring that Word forth, indeed, to bring that gospel and to storm the gates of hell with that gospel, to storm it with the assurance that our Christ is on the throne, that we belong to one who has overcome the world.

Oh, beloved, our marching orders are not to bring these things about so much by the overtaking of political and social realms, but by the proclamation of the gospel and by lives that are lived unto the conformity of Christ. It calls us, beloved in Christ Jesus, to overcome in Christ.

You think of the seven letters to the churches and the promises that are mentioned at the end of each of those letters to the seven churches. Those promises are given to those who overcome.

There is no room for cowardice in the Church of Jesus Christ.

Turn with me a moment to Revelation chapter 21 near the end of the book. Look at verses seven and eight for a moment.

He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.¹⁴

Note what we are hearing here. Note what we are reading here. He who overcomes shall be given all things. But then notice in verse eight in the list of those who shall not inherit the kingdom of God, what is the first sin mentioned? It is not pride. It is not sexual immorality. It is not drunkenness. It is not a whole host of other things. The very first sin that is listed that disqualifies a person from receiving the kingdom of heaven is the sin of cowardice.

There is no room for cowards in the Church of Jesus Christ.

The greatest sin in battle, the greatest sin in warfare is to tuck your tail, as it were, and to run in the opposite direction, the sin of cowardice.

So also it is for the Church of Jesus Christ. The first sin that disqualifies one from inheriting the kingdom is the sin of cowardice.

Beloved, as John comes to the end of this book of Revelation, as heaven has been unveiled, as heaven has been opened, as it has been revealed to God's people, as we have learned what the true reality is that Christ is on the throne, you begin to see that there is no room to be cowards, no room to submit to the wishes of the world, no room to submit to the pleasures of this world or to the hand of this world.

¹⁴ Revelation 21:7-8.

Oh, in this world we may have troubles, but we belong to the one who has overcome the world?

Lord, as we begin a study on this book of Revelation we pray that you would grant us much grace, that you would grant us much knowledge in your Word and, Father, may that Word transform our lives that we might never be the same again, that we might pray with greater fervency, "Come, Lord Jesus," Yea, come quickly.