

## **The Revelation of Jesus Christ**

*Revelation 1:1-3* *1 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, <sup>2</sup> who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. <sup>3</sup> 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.*

### **THIS IS THE WORD OF THE LORD!**

Father God, In Jesus name we come before you and pray for your blessing on the reading and the preaching of your word. May we receive from it the blessings you have promised, and may we ever give glory to your name. In the name of your precious son Jesus Christ, Amen.

At Providence, one of the things we practice here is the proclamation, "This is the Word of the Lord." after our Scripture reading. The minister proclaims this and then the people respond with Thanksgiving. I have no issue with this tradition, but as with all traditions I think it is important that periodically we examine them. Unexamined traditions can easily become meaningless. One of the things that is important to remember when studying the Book of Revelation is that this Book is the Word of the Lord.

I have been asked by several people over the last several weeks and months what my next sermon was going to be on and when I have mentioned that I will be doing a survey of Revelation, I have had some very interesting reactions. There have been some who have been excited, include me in that group, but there have been others who seem stunned, it as if if they somehow regard the Book of Revelation as different from the rest of the Bible.

I think the reason for this reaction is because of so much of what Gary Demar calls "Last Days Madness," that has gripped much of the modern church. It might come as a shock to some people, but the Book of Revelation does not mention, nor even hint at Black helicopters, nor nuclear explosions. The Word antichrist, appears nowhere in the Book. Many people think this book is about our near future, and yet here in the very first verse the author tells us these are things which "must shortly take place."

The Book of Revelation has been portrayed by some as a book that no one in the ancient world could understand, and that it has only been in recent years that these events prophesied in this book could possibly find their fulfillment. Many modern day "prophecy experts," ignore the very clear time texts and references in this wonderful book in favor of speculation and mystery, and in doing this they obscure that this book is not meant to be a mysterious book that can only be read with a decoder ring and the moon is in just the right location. The Book of Revelation is the Word of the Lord, and in saying that, we must remember, that it is tied in and related to the rest of God's Word.

The images and symbols and events portrayed in this book are not somehow easier to understand when we read the Book with a copy of the New York Times sitting next to us, in fact, and this is stunning to many, the images, symbols and signs throughout this book are all found in other places in the Bible. David Chilton referred to the Book of Revelation as the "most Biblical Book in the Bible." Perhaps the reason we struggle with this book today, is because we don't know our Bibles that well. The key to understanding this book is to know the rest of your Bible.

I want to start by looking at the name of the Book. There are some who title this book as "The Apocalypse." In itself this is not necessarily a bad title. After all, in the Greek the first word of

the book is *Apacolipsis*. But the word apacolipsis means to unveil. It means to uncover, or to reveal a secret. Far too often modern readers of this Book come away being more confused than when they started. Another misfortune of calling the Book "The Apocalypse," is that the meaning of the word can cause us to easily miss the meaning of the Book.

I looked at a dictionary to find the meaning of Apocalypse and saw this: "*an event involving destruction or damage on an awesome or catastrophic scale.*" Another definition was this: *the complete final destruction of the world, especially as described in the biblical book of Revelation.* Still, and almost with more frequency, we hear people call the book "RevelationS". Note the added S. It is as though they are reading a bunch of disjointed and scattered visions of some future great cataclysm, however, it is not called Revelations, but "The Revelation of Jesus Christ."

It is quite sad and very telling that a book in our Bible that begins by telling us that it is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, is viewed by most Christians as the Book that contains within it great revelations about the Anti Christ, and the False Prophet. It is interesting that The best-selling books in Christian circles the last 30 or 40 years have all been books that have focused on revealing the hidden secrets contained within this book, and the vast majority of these "Book Store Dreams" have been about the rise of the antichrist, and the coming great tribulation upon our future, but according to the Author of this book, the Book of Revelation, it is a book that unveils and reveals the victorious and ascended Christ. It reveals a Christ who reins, not a Christ waiting to take His throne.

And another interesting aspect of this Book is that the one character beside Jesus that could possibly be said to play a secondary role, is not the anti Christ, it is not the devil. No, that character is the Bride. That character is the City, New Jerusalem.

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place.*

This first verse of the Book has been the source of much great controversy. What do we do with a verse that says the events of the Book will shortly come to pass? We can explain away the meaning of the verse, by redefining what is meant by "shortly." We might be tempted to laugh at that explanation, but sadly, this has been the approach of a lot of today's so called "experts." They invent a theological word to take the meaning out of the word. They come up with what is known as the Doctrine of Immanence. According to this doctrine they teach that the "rapture" of the Church is imminent. This means that this rapture could happen at "any moment." The word imminent, does not appear in the Scriptural text, but what they have done is taken the word soon and claimed that it means imminent. Sadly this translation ignores one of the first rules of Biblical interpretation. We must always use Scripture to interpret the Scripture. We do not, or better yet, we should not interpret the Bible based upon our pet doctrines. The Bible uses the Word soon here, and amazingly this means it would be soon.

But what is soon? When was this book written? If you have a Bible that tells you the date the Book was written, I am guessing that many of you have a Bible that places the Date of this Book as AD 96. I actually have books at home, that claim, that no self respecting Bible Scholar can take an earlier date for the Book of Revelation seriously. However, there is a great deal of evidence that the Book of Revelation was written prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

The internal evidence points to a pre A.D. 70 authorship of the Book because the author writes as though the temple is still standing. If I were to write to you about my visit to the Twin Towers in New York City that I recently went and visited and you were to later figure out when I wrote my letter you would probably not come up with the conclusion that I was writing in 2022. I would love to spend a little bit of time discussing this, but if you are the type of person who finds study of this sort of thing fascinating, I would recommend Dr. Kenneth Gentry's excellent Book, "Before Jerusalem Fell." In this Book he details his thesis, that the Book of Revelation was completed before Jerusalem fell in AD 70. And to set aside any concerns, this is not a theory that was advocated a new by Dr. Gentry. Those supporters of the late date authorship of Revelation try to argue that they have the support of the early Church, because of an obscure quote by the early Church Father Irenaeus, which is very awkwardly translated, but there are several other Church Fathers that argue for an authorship of Revelation during the reign of Nero Caesar.

One of the problems we as modern Christians have is we miss the great significance of the events of AD 70 in the God's redemptive plan. With the Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ, all of the promises regarding Israel, the Land, and the Seed find their fulfillment. Often I am accused of being simplistic when I say this, but when Jesus said it was finished...It really was. Right before Jesus went to the cross, he preached his famous Olivet Discourse. The sermon was not heard by thousands, but it was only proclaimed to his disciples. But in this sermon he spoke of great and world changing events that would soon be coming upon them, he actually gave them a timeline, within that generation.

The Book of Revelation is a portrayal of these hugely significant redemptive historical events. In this book, we read of the divorce of Israel as the bride of Jehovah. We read of growing

persecution of the Church of Christ by those who also rejected our Lord. We read of the destruction of the physical temple and the new rebuilt temple. We read of great and terrible cities and nations, Babylon, Sodom, Egypt, and Jerusalem, and all of them are judged and or assessed, based on the way in which they regard the promised seed. In our modern day assessment of things there are many who regard the promised seed as the nation of Israel. These people will tell you that nations are judged by how they treat the modern secular state of Israel. Every nation judged historically these people will tell you they are judged based on how they treated the Jews. I am not advocating anti-Semitism here, but I am saying that if we identify the promised seed as anything other than Christ, we are going to miss the point.

Galatians 3:16 in the New King James says it this way:

*Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds", as of many; but as of one, And to your Seed, which is Christ.*

When we fail to recognize that the promised seed is Jesus Christ and not the nation of Israel we will of necessity miss the significance of the events of A.D. 70.

Kenneth Gentry said, *"To miss the significance of A.D. 70 is not just to miss the meaning of an important historical event, but to misunderstand much of the New Testament message."* Sadly, we live in a day where much of the New Testament message is misunderstood. It is common to hear Christians today speak of preaching only the essentials. The plea is garbed in the idea of unity. Let's not deal with matters like eschatology, because after all, that teaching divides. I mean Jesus Himself said that even He did not know the time of His return. Well, the problem is not in determining the time of the Lord's Return, the problem is that many Christians are ignorant

of great scope of the Salvation that Christ has wrought for his people. And sadly, I think much of the ignorance comes from a faulty understanding of this last book of the Bible.

The events of this Book are said to be *sent and signified by His angel to His servant John, <sup>2</sup> who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.*

In the introduction of this book, we are told that these events are signified by His angel to His servant John. Symbols and signs are absolutely critical to a proper understanding of the Book of Revelation. With that being said though, what are symbols and signs? The great Dutch Theologian Herman Bavinck speaking of symbols said "The Bible does not contain a few anthropomorphisms; on the contrary, all Scripture is anthropomorphic...thus all the names with which God names himself and by means which he allows us to address him are derived from earthly and human relations." Anthropomorphism's are when God or His attributes are described using human characteristics or attribute. Bavinck goes on to tell us that the central value of anything is that it is a symbol of God. All other values and relationships are secondary.

Many modern attempts at reading the Book of Revelation attempt to read the symbols and signs in this book as though they are separate and isolated symbols, yet the symbols in this Book are part of what Chilton referred to as a system of symbolism. In it all the parts fit together. If we read the Bible paying careful attention to these symbols and meaning then we will begin to see how they fit perfectly together with this glorious story of redemption.

Reading many of the commentaries on the Book of Revelation is almost like the old boxes of cereal or Cracker Jacks. I like to refer to these as Cracker Jack theology. Some of you may know what I am talking about here. When I was a kid, I can remember cereal boxes or Cracker Jacks coming with puzzles or hidden images on the back of the box. If you sent in a proof of

purchase and \$4.99 then the company would send you the magic decoder ring, and suddenly all the mysteries on the back of your box of candy would be solved. Many of today's prophecy experts do the same sort of thing. Send them a certain donation, and they will send you their "tell all prophecy Bible," or their special commentary on the Book of Revelation, which "unlocks" the hidden key to understanding the mysteries of this book, but the hidden key to this book is really not that hidden. And Cracker Jack theology far too often point away from it.

John's purpose, and there is no reason to think the John who wrote the Book of Revelation was different from the author of the Gospel of John or the Books of 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> John, His purpose in writing this Book was to strengthen the Christian Community by showing them the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord. One of the early themes of this book is that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all of the prophecy in Daniel including that He has ascended to the right hand of the Ancient of Days and from there He is ruling the nations with His rod of iron in fulfillment of Psalms 110.

From this exalted throne He is subduing the nations under us. Romans 16:20 tells us that the God of Peace will SOON crush Satan underneath our feet. The early Christians read this during a time of great tribulation and John was encouraging them with the words that Jesus was Lord. And that all of their enemies and His would be subdued. One of the great mysteries that bothers me when I read this book is that the audience that John addressed this letter too was a small persecuted minority and John told them that Jesus was Lord, and that Jesus reigned, No matter what things looked like their enemies would be subdued and the reign of Christ would be extended.

Today, nearly two thousand years after the writing of this Book, Christ still reigns and the evidence of his reign is everywhere, and yet today's Christians shout their anthems, that "Woe is



me, things are worse now than they have ever been. Jesus must come soon to rescue us from this woeful and terrible world." Let me blunt...Christ reigns now and we Christians often live as though the devil does.

Twice in the first three verses we are told the time was near and the events of this prophecy and the events spoke of are soon to be. What events? Well there are several and I hope to cover the high points in this survey. I will not answer every single question you might have about the Book of Revelation. I want to give us an overview of the Book and point you in the right direction about how to read this Book and the rest of the Bible.

Verse 3 of today's text reads: "*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.*"

One of the interesting things about this Book is it is the only Book in the Bible that promises a blessing to those who read and hear it. Hear here, means to understand. It is not merely to audibly grasp. This Book has a theme, and that theme is the same as that of the entire New Testament. "Jesus Christ is Lord." I have often claimed that one of the problems with Christian cliches is that we say them so often they lose their meaning. One of those cliches is the aforementioned theme. "Jesus Christ is Lord." We say it so often it lacks meaning. When we say Jesus is Lord what do we mean? In Matthew 28:19-20 we read the Great Commission.

*<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.*

As I mentioned last week, I don't think I can count all of the Sermons I have heard on these verses in my life. Missions sermons, Evangelistic sermons, but the great commission begins

with a "therefore." As we know, whenever we see a therefore, we must always ask what it is therefore. The preceding verse tells us that

*And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, <sup>1</sup>“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”*

The reason we go, the reason we preach, the reason we baptize is because Jesus Christ is Lord. It was after this Great Commission that Christ ascended to the Right Hand of the Father.

The Salvation that Christ won for His people is detailed in this Book of Revelation. May we be people who are blessed at the hearing and reading of the Word of the Lord. May we understand truly the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the Lord.