

## **An Introduction to the Book of Revelation**

Revelation 1-3

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, October 29, 2023

Before we begin our sermon, I would ask if you would go to the Lord in a word of prayer for me. The reason is because we are talking about a very sobering topic this morning. And it's something that's kind of captured my heart this week in my studies, but I don't know if I have the vocabulary to express it like I think I should. So let's just go to the Lord in a word of prayer and ask Him for grace. This is a very selfish prayer, but I think that's okay as a pastor just asking for His help.

But Heavenly Father, I do come to you this morning, just my hand kind of on my mouth and my head bowed, just thinking about the future. And the fact that anytime we talk about the future, Your Word is so clear about certain things. But there's other parts of it that are just too wonderful for us to know. And so we pray as we come to this subject this morning, our greatest prayer is that You will be glorified. And that any talk about the future would point us to the cross, the One who died so that we could have a future with You. And so I pray for that this morning. I do pray for those who are here among us. Some of them have studied this topic before; others have not. And I just pray You would unify us and point our hearts to the throne of grace, where we will receive mercy in that future day. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, this morning, we are beginning a brand-new series here at Grace that's going to take us up until Christmas time on the subject of the return of Christ. This is a topic that we've never talked about before as a church in any detail anyway. This is our first time to address it from the pulpit. And just to introduce it, I want to tell you a story that I think connects this series with the previous one that we just went through.

The story is told at the time, the American pastor Donald Gray Barnhouse was traveling to Ireland to do a conference in 1939. Now, if you think about the timing of that, it will make the story make sense. But while he was on his way there, he was told England and France had just declared war on Germany. On his trip to the country, World War Two had just started. The continent of Europe was about to plunge itself into chaos, which didn't really surprise him because he knew something was going on. Everywhere he went on his trip, there was roadblocks and barricades and armed soldiers on the way checking him at checkpoints and whatnot. But it did shock him when he showed up at the conference and the place was full. He thought by all accounts, they were going to cancel the event, but they didn't. They carried on with it. There was even one whole section of the church devoted just to soldiers in uniform. The pastor came up to him and told him and said, "I'm really glad you're here. I don't know what to say. Some of these men, this will be the last sermon that they ever hear in a church before they die." It kind of threw him into a panic. Dr. Barnhouse was kind of stunned. How do you respond to something like that? But he opened his Bible to Matthew chapter 24. And you sit up in front of the congregation and you read these words, you've probably heard them before. "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see that

you not be troubled for all these things must come to pass. But that is not the end.” Then he paused for a moment before asking the congregation. “What does Jesus mean when He says, ‘Do not be troubled.’” When you hear about a war, how can you not be troubled?” And he said, “It’s because you know God is sovereign. And you know, the Lord is in control. He’s on the throne, and He has the end planned out from the beginning.” Amen. I would say that’s the way to start a conference. It got my attention.

His point is that Christians have no reason to be worried about things like that; we have no cause to fear because the Lord has told us about the Earth final days in the Bible. Biblical prophecy is not given to us, not to Christians, to make you be afraid. Now the lost world should be afraid, and unbelievers should fear. But it’s given to Christians to give us a sense of comfort and let our hearts be settled because the Lord has already told us what the end of the world will look like. And it will look like this; it will not look like that.

I don’t know if you’re aware of this or not, but scholars have determined that about 25% of the Bible is on the subject of prophecy. It means about one out of every four or five verses that you read talks about a future event. And some of those future events have been fulfilled. But the reason that’s the Bible is set up this way is so you don’t have to go around saying, “Is this the end? Or is that the end? Did Jesus come back, and I missed Him?” He wants you to have more assurance than that. And there’s probably no book in the Bible that explains this better than the book of Revelation. So if you have your Bibles with you, please turn with me to the book of Revelation. It’s not hard to find; it’s just the last book in the Bible, the very last one. We’re going to walk through it in a moment.

But before we do, I want to draw your attention to just a simple thing you see in the very first chapter. If you look in Revelation 1:13, there’s a very important image I want imprinted on your mind as we begin this. And it says in Revelation 1:13, “John saw One like a Son of Man.” You see that there? What does that mean? It means he saw Jesus. Who was he looking at as the book begins, he’s looking face to face with the risen Lord. In order to remind you that when the end of the world comes, there will be One person standing over it, and it will be the Lord Jesus Christ. And when the final days arrive, and when it’s time to meet the Lord, there’ll be one person calling the shots and it will be Him. It will not be Germany. It will not be the Nazis. It will not be Hitler. It won’t be China. It won’t be Russia. It won’t be ISIS. It won’t be Hamas. It won’t be Iraq. It won’t be Al Qaeda, or any awful grouping. There’ll be one King, one King. And this is who it is.

And if you look in your Bibles, it made such an impression on John because when he saw Him, verse 17, said he felt down at His feet like a dead man. Some charismatic guy was saying one time he saw Jesus, and he was shaving in his bathroom, he just kept on shaving. John did not shave when he saw Jesus. He fell over. And when it says that he fell over, it doesn’t mean he went down on a knee. It means he fell over like this with his hand stretched out and his face to the ground, in a posture of abject humility to show he is nothing, he’s nobody, he’s zero; Christ is everything. He must become greater; I must become less. He must be exalted; I must be forgotten. But the reason I want to point this out to you

is this is how the book of Revelation begins. It begins with someone bowing down and worshipping the name of Jesus Christ.

John had met Jesus before. Decades before, he had talked to the Lord. Now he sees Him again, and it's a different because he knows right away that Jesus, this, Jesus Christ is going to judge the world and make all things new. I'm telling you all this today because throughout the recent series on the government, several people have told me they felt really discouraged. As you study this subject of the church and state and politics and the situation in Canada, worldwide, it makes you wonder, is there any hope for the world today? Will it ever get better? And the answer is it will because of Christ. It will get better because He's coming back again. It won't get better because of merely human efforts, and it won't get better because of the government. And it won't get better because our politicians finally come to their senses and get their act together. We pray for those things. It would be wonderful to see it. But it will happen primarily because God has fixed a day when He will judge the world in righteousness through Him. God's not going to leave this world where it is right now. He's not going to ignore all this suffering and pain and misery. He's going to send his Son to stop it. And that's how we're going to begin this series today.

What I want to do this morning is I want to take John's vision of Christ here and in chapter one, which Richard did a wonderful job of reading for us, and I want to use this as a springboard to introduce the rest of the book to you, we're not going to be able to get to everything in Revelation today, that's just not possible. But what I want to do is just give you an overview of the book and start with Christ.

Because before John goes into all this stuff about judgment and prophecies, and the end of the world, the Great Tribulation, he pauses for a moment to remind you what this is about. And that is Jesus. Amen? I get excited talking about this. If you're taking notes this morning, let me just give you an outline of what we're going to look at. There's just gonna be three themes in the book of Revelation that we're going to talk about today. So if you're taking notes, to begin this series, to introduce the book and just the subject of prophecy, we're going to look at three themes. And they're very simple if you want to write them down. They are the past, the present, and the future. If you're going to outline the Book of Revelation, that's how it unfolds; you're going to see the past, the present and the future. Past and the present are in the first part of the book; the future is the bulk of the rest of it.

But let's start with the past. In chapter one, John takes us to a vision that he had of the Lord in the past. And if you look in verse nine of chapter one, and this is what he says about the vision, or how he begins. He says, "I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance *which are* in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."

Now, for the sake of time, I didn't read all the verses above that. But when you read all of those, you find that this is the third time John mentions himself in the first chapter. It's kind of unusual. Typically,

when someone introduces themselves in the Bible, they do it once, and then they move on. But John does it multiple times in Revelation one, to really show you what he thought about himself, and that is that he was nothing. Every one of these introductions he gives you are more and more humble. For example, in verse one, he calls himself or refers himself loosely as a bond servant, or a slave. And then in verse four, he calls himself John and he doesn't give himself a title. He's just John, plain old John, ordinary John, normal John. Then in verse nine, he is your brother; not an apostle, but your brother. Not one of the 12, but he says "a fellow partaker in the tribulation and trials."

Then he says he ended up on the island of Patmos, just to highlight the type of trials he's talking about. He ends up in this place, which is not a vacation spot. Patmos was a prison island the Romans would send convicts to. It was a stretch of land about 10 miles long, six miles wide, located in the Aegean Sea off the coast of Asia Minor. That's the area of the world that's called Turkey today. They would use this to put criminals in because there was no way to get off of it. Once you're on that island, you're surrounded by water, and you're stuck. John was placed there, according to church history as an old man; he was in his 90s. Most people when they're in their latter years go to a nursing home, John went to jail. Which means he did not write this book from the Holiday Inn; it was much different than that.

As you can imagine the setting he would have been discouraged. Would be frustrating for him. We all want to spend our latter years in a better place than that. And so he's probably wondering things like, "What's going on, Lord? Why are you leaving me here all alone?" And so the Lord reveals himself to John, to show he's not alone.

And if you look in verse 10, it says this. It says he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. That phrase in the spirit means he was in a spiritual trance or a prophetic state. He's not being spirit baptized or spirit filled. He's being given a prophecy to comfort him. And it says while he's doing this, "I heard behind me a loud voice, like the sound of a trumpet saying, 'Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches that are all listed here.' Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me, and having turned I saw seven golden lampstands and in the middle of the lampstands, I saw one like a son of man."

Now, before we go any further, I need to say a few words about this because as you just read this, you can tell this is where John shifts gears for a moment from his normal straightforward style of writing to something else. Before this, when he's talking about himself or he's talking about the circumstances, it's very plain the way that he's writing. But now he's talking about lampstands, and a son of man, and the images are shifting because this is where the vision begins. That's happening because this is where he's giving his word of prophecy. And depending on who you read from, some commentators say there's eight visions in the book of Revelation. This is the first one. And the significance is in this one, he sees Jesus face to face. And He appears to him it says, like a son of man, which means He looked like a son of man, but He was more than a son of man. And He looked like a human, you could tell there's human

characteristics, but there's something else going on here. Because it says He's in the midst of the seven lampstands.

If you look in verse 20, it tells you there that the lampstands refers to the church. So in a sense, Jesus is in the midst of the seven churches. That is intended to convey the fact that He is where His people are. He's shepherding them, He's leading them, He's loving them, caring for them, guiding them. Where His people go, Christ's goes.

And as He explains this, this is why I wanted to pray with you before this sermon, because he gives several descriptions of Jesus that we've got to go through. You can't skip over this. But when you do this, you've got to bow your head and put your hand on your mouth because there's none of these that you're gonna get your mind around completely. And there's not one of these pictures that should not humble you to the dust. I was studying this this week, and I was blown away personally and I even thought, "How am I going to communicate all this?" But let's just walk through them, so our hearts can worship what we read.

But the first one is in verse 13 when it says, "In the middle of the lampstands, I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across his chest with a golden sash." What does that mean? Well, that means that this is what Jesus was wearing when John saw Him. This is what He had on. He had the clothes of a king. In the first century, kings wore long robes; they had big flowing cloaks that would reach all the way down to the floor, sometimes beyond that. You guys have seen pictures of this. And that's what Christ had on His person. If you remember, this should really humble you because when the prophet Isaiah had a vision of heaven, Isaiah six says that "In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and exalted, with the train of his robe filling the temple." You remember that? You see the connection there. God's robe was so long that it filled the temple. Christ's robe is so long it goes down to His feet. The Lord's cloak was so big, it goes from end to end. It never stops almost. It's the same way here because Jesus is God. He wears the same garments as the Lord Almighty.

It also says that His hair and His head were like wool or snow. That's a prophetic reference to His wisdom now. The robes represent His sovereignty, His head represents His understanding and intelligence. When someone had white hair, it was used to refer to the fact that they're wise now. Some of us live up to that; some of us don't, but that's the image. The last time John saw Jesus, the Lord was in His 30s or thereabout, which means He probably had brown hair like most Jews. Now, it's changed. It's white. This highlights the fact that Christ is wise and intelligent and omniscient. It tells you that he is prudent and judicious and shrewd. He knows everything. His mind is boundless. You can never get to the bottom of Him.

The Vision also says, it's gonna kind of escalate as you go through this and get higher and higher, because His eyes are like a flame of fire. That shows you that it's the feeling that His eyes are like torches. They're like lasers burning a hole into everything they look at. Make no mistake, you might be able to hide from some things; you can't hide from the eyes of Christ. And you might escape some people's glare, you cannot escape His glare. Wherever you go, He sees you. Whatever you do, He knows. When you read the letters to the seven churches, there's a phrase that's repeated over and over again, "I know. I know." You go here, I know. You go there, I know. You do this, I know. It's another attribute of Christ that's talked about in the Old Testament. Daniel 10:6 says Daniel has a vision of what looks to be the pre-incarnate Christ and His eyes are like torches of fire. Jesus had eyes like that in the Old Testament. He has eyes like that in the New Testament. Daniel saw that vision hundreds of years before; it's still going on now.

Another description of Him here is that his feet are like burned bronze when it's been made to glow in a furnace. And that says that Jesus' feet burn everything they touch. They scorch whatever they land upon. Wherever He goes, He convicts the world of sin. Some of you men are welders in the church, and you know what it's like to put metal into a furnace and take it out. What does it do? It scorches everything. Everything it touches, it makes you say, "Ouch." Christ does that. He brings judgment. He inflicts pain. He's not warm and cuddly here.

It also says His voice was like the sound of many waters. It drowns out everything. It was like the crashing of the waves against the shores of the island of Patmos that John was on. It was deafening. It was piercing. His voice was the kind of thing that would pick you up by the collar and shake you. When Jesus talked, you listened.

In His right hand, verse 16 says, He holds seven stars. Earlier, He was in the midst of seven lampstands. Now He's holding seven stars. Verse 20, says that's another reference to the churches, or the angels over the churches. He holds them in the palm of His hand. Christ never lets His people go. When the world does this, Jesus does this. He has perfect control over them.

It also says that out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword to kill His enemies. A sword is a symbol of violence, war, battle. It means He's about to go to war.

And one more description you see in the text here is that His face was like the sun shining in its strength. That gives you the impression of glory. You can't look at the sun more than a few seconds without going blind. You can't look at Christ without doing the same. He has the same effect. He is radiant, glorious, majestic.

And I think it would be good to stop here for a moment and just say this is quite a vision. It should be amazing for us to consider this. To my knowledge, there's nothing else like this in the Bible. There are parts of the Bible obviously, the Gospels tell you about Christ. They give you all kinds of information

about His life, but they don't talk about His appearance this way. Isaiah says there was nothing in His appearance to even cause you to think about Him much. He looked very ordinary. This is not ordinary anymore. And the reason John is giving you this amazing picture of the Lord is to show you that Jesus is about to judge the world. He goes into this detail to show you that He's about to bring down wrath upon it. And this is why He has the right to do it because He looks like this. He is one like a son of man standing in the midst of the churches with a face that looks like the sun.

I think it's safe to say people don't look at Jesus like this today. You guys know what I'm talking about? They don't see Him like this. Most people look at Christ right now as their buddy. They see Him as their friend, their pal. One bumper sticker in Chilliwack said, "He's my copilot." John says He's your Lord. He's your God.

If you look in verse 17 again, this is John's response. It says he did fall down at his feet. He didn't stand up and hug Jesus, not that there's not a time to do that. He didn't give Him a high five. He worshiped.

And if you notice in that passage, Jesus says in verse 17, "Do not be afraid." It shows you His grace, doesn't it? Don't fear. don't worry because He's a God who delights to show mercy. But it does highlight the reality that one day every knee is going to bow to Him. In my studies this week I came across an interesting article that was talking about this issue. It quoted Philippians 2, which says at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow. And it said, "Who will bow to Jesus? Let me tell you, every knee will bow." And that means saved knees will bow and unsaved knees will bow. Christians will bow. Non-Christians will bow. Kids will bow; adults will bow. The old will bow; the young will bow. Black and white, rich and poor, male and female, homosexuals, drunks, drug addicts, liars, murderers, thieves, hypocrites Pharisees, Muslims, Sikhs, Jews, Buddhists, atheists, agnostics, it doesn't matter who you are, if you have a knee, it's going to bow. If you have a body, it's going to do this and prostrate itself before Him. In fact, if you want to know who this is referring to, reach down and touch your knee and know that knee will bow. And then reach over and touch your neighbors knee, don't do this, but that knee will bow. The person on your left, the person on your right, they're all going to submit to His Lordship.

The question is, have you bowed already? Have you submitted your knee to the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the only thing that can save you. You're saved by grace alone, and you're saved by believing in Him, but part of believing in Him is acknowledging that this is who He is. He is the king. Nothing else matters if you don't see Him this way.

And that brings it to another major theme in the book of Revelation. So it begins by giving you this vision of Christ in His exalted state. When He was on the earth, He was crucified. He was humbled, he was debased. He's not like that anymore. It's completely different. But John takes this image now of Him that he's seen in the past, and he begins to relate it to the present state of the churches. That's the transition here in the book of Revelation. He's gonna go from the past to the present. It's the same vision, but now it's being applied to the current state of affairs.

And if you want to know what churches we're referring to, you can see them in your Bibles. If you look in chapters two through three, John begins to take this vision and Christ begins to apply it to the church in Ephesus, the church in Smyrna, the church in Pergamum, the church in Thyatira, the church in Sardis, the church in Philadelphia, and the church in Laodicea. The reason He's picking all of these is because they were closest to John on a map. If you were leaving the island of Patmos and you were going to the mainland of Asian Minor, several miles away, you would arrive at the port of Ephesus, and then you would go north to Smyrna and then you would go further north to Pergamum and then you would go east to Thyatira, then you would go south to Sardis, south to Philadelphia, south to Laodicea and then go back to Ephesus. These were all in a clockwise circle. These were in his own backyard, John's backyard. And so Christ is going to give His personal evaluation of them. This would be like the Lord going through these churches with a clipboard and saying, "Yeah, you're doing this well, but you're failing over here. Work on this, way to go here," that kind of thing. If you want to know what Jesus thinks about His church, this is it.

We can't go through all these but let me just talk to you about the church in Ephesus, the first one here so you can get a flavor of this. It was the largest church in the group, or at least it came from the largest town. If you were looking at all these cities, Ephesus was the biggest one. Historians say the population of Ephesus was close to half a million people at this time. It's one of the biggest cities in the ancient world. It was an ideal spot to plant a church. In fact, it wasn't just a church that was there. But it was a church of churches. It was quite a place. It was started by the apostle Paul in the book of Acts. Then it was helped along by Priscilla and Aquila, then Apollos, then Timothy, then Tychicus, and a whole host of characters in the Bible. The apostle John even pastored the church in Ephesus for a while. Some say John was buried there. You can go to the ruins of Ephesus today, and you can see the Basilica of the apostle John. So it had quite a foundation. We would say in modern times, if this was a modern church, this is where something like the Shepherd's Conference would be held today, or the G3 conference or the Master's Seminary or Westminster Seminary. The church in Ephesus is where the biggest Christian libraries would be and the bookstores and the podcast. This is where you would go to learn about youth ministry and children's ministry and music ministry. They had all that there. This was the church with the \$5 million budget, full parking lot, a billion people on Facebook, whatever you want to say.

Which is why the Lord commends them for things in this passage. He says a lot of positive stuff about their ministry. They couldn't tolerate evil men. They put some people to the test. But He also has a problem with them. And let me read this to you so you can see what it is. If you look in Revelation chapter two, it says,

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks [a]among the seven golden lampstands, says this:



‘I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance.’

Things that they're doing well, right?

‘you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be* false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary. But,’

And here's the issue. This is where He's going with a clipboard. And He's saying, “Yes, yes, yes. Here's the No.”

‘I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.’

What was the problem with the church in Ephesus? It was not that they had left their first doctrine. They had that. It was not that they left their first diligence or in theology. They had that too. They hadn't left their discernment. They hadn't left their books. They hadn't left their theology. They've left their passion behind. They were like a machine with no fire burning in the engine. They were like a plane that was in the air, but there was no motor making it run. They went to church, but they weren't really a church. You guys know what I mean? And they were here, but they weren't really here.

The word “left” it could be translated forgotten. The problem was not that they never loved Jesus. The problem is they loved Him and forgot Him over time. Their affection had dwindled. And as a result, if you look in verse five, Jesus doesn't say, “Well, at least you're coming to church.” And He doesn't tell them, “Well, I'm glad you're here and not somewhere else.” Look at what He says. He says, “Therefore remember from where you have fallen.” He says you are your fallen. You're blowing it. Repent. Do the deeds you did at first, or else I'm coming, and I will remove your lampstand. That's another way of saying I'm about to shut the whole thing down. You don't want to be a lamp stand? I will blow it out. You don't want to embrace the light? I'm going to take the light away. That's a terrible thing to see.

You know, when you look at Christ's ministry, even in the gospels, and you look at how He interacted with certain people, you would see that a group, like the Pharisees, you would think He could get along with them, right? Because they were religious, they were spiritual; they never missed the day at church. He fought with them constantly because of this. Makes you wonder how could they do this, but then, before you're too hard on them, let me just say, if you're going to write a letter to the church in Canada, I think it would sound like this. Don't you agree? If you are going to evaluate churches in Chilliwack, Christians in our town, how many of them have left their first love? How many of them were excited about the church one day, but now they're cold? They're hard. They don't want to be there anymore. They used to want to be there; now they'd rather be anywhere else. Jesus says that “I hate that sort of

thing in the church, so you need to stop.” The word “repent,” means you need to turn the other way. You are going this way; turn around. “You come here because you love Me,” or He says, “Don't come here at all.”

We're going to talk about this tonight at the installation service, but when the Lord is talking to Peter in John 21, He wants to know one thing: do you love Me? Do you love Me? That's the first qualification for a minister of the gospel. Not the five points of Calvinism, although that's important. Not do you know, supralapsarianism. Robert, do you know anything about that? Okay. Do you have a passion for me? The book of Revelation, remember, it's about the Lord Jesus Christ. It's about His glory. If you forget that, you forget everything.

I've told you before, one of my favorite things to do is to walk through old church buildings and look at the pictures on the wall. I love history. I've always been fascinated with it. And when I walk through these old buildings, it makes me wonder if the people back then would be proud of the way their church is now. Would they be happy with it? In many cases, I don't think they would, I think they would roll over in their grave.

I was talking to one of my relatives back in the states who came from an old church like this, and he told me their denomination was leaving over homosexuality or the ordaining of gay bishops. And I thought, you know, that's great that you need to do that. But you know what, you guys haven't baptized someone in 50 years here. You haven't shared the gospel because you don't believe the gospel anymore. So who cares about that. You need to go back to this first. Jesus says if you find yourself personally in that kind of state, you got to turn it around or He's going to make you regret it. Very strong words in this passage.

You know, if you went to this part of the world now, if you went to the area where Ephesus was in the first century, one thing that would strike you is that the church in Ephesus is gone, not there. The church in Smyrna, gone; Pergamum, gone; Thyatira, gone; Sardis, it's just ruins. Because they didn't do this. All of them lost their passion at one point, and the Lord closed them up.

It should be a reminder for us not to do the same thing. If you're not careful, you can get the impression that you're a Christian just because you go to church, just because your moral, conservative, whatever word you want to use. Here, the Bible says it's the opposite.

And it brings you to one more theme and in this book of Revelation. To go through these other ones to review, the first one is the past and the second one is the present, very simple. John starts off by giving you this vision of Jesus in the past to apply it to the current state of affairs. And what he says is shocking because he goes through the seven churches in Asia Minor, and he evaluates someone on the basis of one thing, and it's not their building. He does not evaluate them on the basis of their budget, or their website. It's on the basis of passion, their care for Christ, sincerity. He wants to know am I the number one priority in your life, above anything else? A church never rises above that. It never goes beyond

their love of Jesus. You can have the best music ministry, you can have the best Sunday school, you can have the best youth group, children, whatever, preaching, if you neglect this, it's all worthless. It's worthless. Which should be something that convicts all of us today.

And it brings you to one more theme in this book of Revelation, and this is the one we're going to be talking about in all the weeks to come; but that is the future. A third major theme in the book of Revelation is the future, which refers to what John talks about after describing the past and the present in these first chapters. Because starting in chapter four, he gives him another vision and it's entirely focused on what is to come.

If you remember I mentioned, there's eight, by most accounts, there's eight visions in the book of Revelation. This is the second one. We just looked at the first. And it's described this way in chapter four verse one, when it says, "After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven." This vision here, begins with a door. Earlier, John saw Jesus; now he sees a door. Before he was glancing or looking at the Lord. Now he's looking at something else.

And it says, "While a voice which I heard like the sound of a trumpet," that's the voice of Christ that he heard earlier, "speaking, saying to him, come." Come where? Well, come through the door. What door? It was the door leading to heaven into the dwelling place of God. In Greek, this phrase actually says he saw a door that was already opened in heaven. John didn't open it himself; someone else did, to show that he was welcomed there. He couldn't go into heaven on his own. The Lord made a way, which is a beautiful thing.

And we're going to spend all of next week looking at this, the rest of this vision, but it's a very glorious one, because a lot of people say, I'd like to go to heaven. Well, this is what John saw in heaven. It's not hokey, like you would see in some books today. It's a very beautiful image. The word "heaven" is mentioned over 50 times in the book of Revelation to show that John was not a stranger there, he was a regular guest in this book.

And as he's going through all this, it says in verse one, Jesus promises to show him the future. Here's how he says it, it says he would show him what would take place after these things. The phrase "after these things" means that Jesus would show John, what would take place after the things that he's just experienced, after the things he's described in chapters one through three, and after the issues with the seven churches. Because from this point onwards, the book is going to deal primarily with the events that are to come, prophecies that have yet to be fulfilled in God's redemptive plan. Even though the vision in chapters one through three has happened, I would argue that the things in the rest of this book have not.

When it describes the scene in heaven with the lamb taking the scroll in chapter five and opening it. I don't think that's occurred yet. It's still a ways off. And when it talks about the great tribulation that starts

in chapter six, it's the same way there. And when it mentioned the seven seals, and seven trumpets, and seven bowls of wrath, and the Beast and the Antichrist, and the marriage supper of the Lamb, all that stuff, we're still waiting for it. It's yet to come in the future.

Now, having said that, I know there's different ways to interpret some of this. I was studying all this this week. I didn't have a chance to put them all down here but let me mention just a few of them.

One is the view of what's called Preterism, which comes from a Latin word that means the past. There are some Christian scholars who want to take the events in Revelation four and onwards and put them back into the past in the first century. They say that all of this happened in AD 70 when the temple was destroyed. The problem, I think, is that you can't really do that because in these prophecies, it says they're worldwide in scope. In other words, they didn't just occur in Jerusalem at the temple in a regional place, they go far beyond that. And so if we're going to take it as it sounds, they're an earth wide event.

There are some others who look at these chapters, and they, they say that they are spiritual. It's called the spiritual view. So the idea is that whether they occur in Jerusalem or not, doesn't really matter. They're just symbolic of the cosmic war between good and evil. The issue with that one is that John's first prophecy was not just symbolic. When he saw a vision of Christ, he thought it was real and specific, and it looks like it would be the same way with the rest of these. And if you have some questions about that, again, we're going to talk about that more in the in the weeks to follow.

But let me just say, when you look at this in the future, I think it gives you hope. I think it should be encouraging because it takes you back to what Donald Gray Barnhouse said in the beginning of the sermon. Jesus hasn't come yet. The end of the world is not yet here, so don't be troubled. Don't panic. Don't be afraid. You don't have to look around at the events and say, "Is this the end of the world? Did I miss it? Did Christ come and I blew it?" You didn't. The point of John's revelation here is that when Christ comes, you will know. It will be obvious; it'll look like this. That's why we read the book of Revelation. That's why we study the subject of prophecy, so we can have confidence in these things, and not be afraid.

Again, lost people should be afraid. Unbelievers, when they read it, the judgment that is to come should quake in fear. Believers should not.

Jesus told John in this first vision in chapter one, "Do not be afraid." But even if you want to look back at the beginning of the book, if you look in chapter one, verse three, this gives you another reassurance for reading this prophecy. It says, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and heed the things which are written in it. For the time is near." John says do you want to be blessed? Well read the book of Revelation. And do you want to experience the mercies of God in a new way? Well, you should study what this says.

When you do that, it was my prayer this morning, that you would never see Jesus the same way again. And when you look at the book of Revelation, and you see what it says about the Saviour here, you'll see Him through brand new eyes. He will be displayed in His splendor going among the churches caring for His people with a robe reaching to His feet, hair white like wool, eyes like flames of fire, holding the stars in His right hand, and you will have no choice but to bow. When you see Him this way, there's nothing to do but kneel before Him and worship.

Is there any hope for the world today? There is because of Christ. It will get better because when He comes, He will make all things new. I don't know about you, but I don't think I could make it if I didn't believe that. When I look at the world today and see how just messed up, backwards, crazy it all is I don't have any hope beyond that, eternally. He will come back and renew it.

In fact, if you don't know Christ today, and if your knee has never bowed to Him, I would encourage you that the time to do that is now. The Bible tells us that God is holy and man is sinful, and man cannot reach Him on his own. That door has to be opened by God. You cannot open it yourself to heaven. And that's why Jesus has come to go to the cross. He is the Son of God, one with the Father, Blessed Trinity. He came down from heaven to live a perfect life, whereby He went to Calvary, paid for our sins, pardoned our guilt, satisfied the wrath of God, gave us forgiveness, defeated Satan, vanquished the powers of hell, and shed His precious blood. So He could say, "It is finished." There's nothing more to pay.

You might say, "Well, that's all wonderful, Jeremy, but Jesus would never have me. I'm so bad. He would not want me. I'm a rotten, stinking sinner." Well, if you're a rotten, stinking sinner, you've come to the right place. That's what He died for. He was crucified for your rotten, stinking sin, if you would believe in Him, and come to Him humbly and throw yourself at His feet. Will you do that today? I would encourage you to do that. The book reminds us that Christ is coming. And we want to be ready for Him when He does.

So let's close in a word of prayer and ask the Lord for us to have that kind of spirit as we approach this book.

Heavenly Father, we come to you this morning broken over what we've looked at, just because none of us can bow low enough at the throne of Jesus Christ. And none of us can prostrate ourselves before Him to the degree that He is worthy. So Father, we pray for your help in approaching this subject with the right spirit that honours you.

Father, thank you for what you've revealed about the future because if there's anything that we're anxious about, oftentimes, it is just that we look at this world and we're so scared of where things are heading. And it looks so messed up. And yet this book reminds us that it is messed up and it is broken. But you will fix it one day. We trust in that and hope in that and I know we've just scratched the surface

of all these things. This is just a preparation, but Lord, we want to point this in the right direction, and that is to Christ.

So I pray for those who are here this morning. I pray if there's any who are lost who don't know Him, that they would be reminded of their need to come to the Saviour. This book is about Christ. If you don't know Christ, all this is going to be terrifying to you. So I pray for their conversion and salvation even today, Lord, that they would be prepared for the future by putting their faith in His name. Thank you for the Saviour. Thank you, Lord, that we did not just see Him crucified and bruised and beaten and all of those things, but now we can see Him resurrected, exalted and glorified, that we would give Him all the praise for who He is. And we pray this in His name. Amen.