

This morning, I am beginning a new series through the book of Revelation that will take us up to the end of November. The author of this book is named John, which could be the beloved apostle who wrote the gospel of John and the letters 1, 2 & 3 John, or it could be an early Christian prophet. It was likely written during the reign of Domitian (81-96 AD). This morning we will be in Revelation ch. 1.

Revelation 1:1-20 - *The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ² who testifies to everything he saw-- that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. ³ Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near. John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father-- to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. ⁷ Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen. ⁸ "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰ On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, ¹¹ which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea." ¹² I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. ¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. ¹⁹ "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. ²⁰ The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand*

and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

This morning, I want to share the three main messages from chapter 1. And keep in mind v. 3: *Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near*

1) There is an earthly “reality” and an unseen heavenly Reality

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.

If you are going to read the Bible, properly, you have to read the Bible in its context, according to genre. Revelation is the Greek word “Apocalypsis,” which is like prophecy on steroids (prophecy is God speaking through a human, often to confront people with their sin). In apocalyptic literature, matters of the future or the spiritual realm are unveiled, usually through the agency of angels, in lurid colors and with many crazy symbols. Apocalyptic literature is very visual. Instead of saying “Jesus is the judge” it shows Jesus with a sword coming out of mouth. Instead of saying Jesus is sovereign over his church, it shows him holding seven stars in his hand, which are the angels of the seven churches. Instead of saying that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of all the churches, he writes that they are the seven spirits before the throne. And instead of saying that the churches are lights, it depicts them as seven lampstands. In other words, do not read Revelation literally.

In addition to the imagery, Revelation contains a lot of OT prophecies that are beginning to be fulfilled in Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven. **Revelation is also an epistle**, or letter addressed to a crowd. It is an apocalyptic prophecy written down in letter form as a circular letter to the churches in Asia. There were more than seven churches – seven is the number of completeness. Seven reminds us that it is for all churches at all times.

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.

Revelation is the unveiling of Jesus to help them know what must soon take place. It has been inaugurated, but not consummated. Already but not yet fully.

There is an earthly “reality” and an unseen heavenly Reality

This is true throughout the Bible. Think of Joseph. There is what I see – being sold into slavery by his brothers, being forgotten in prison, being unjustly persecuted – and then there is what God is doing behind the scenes: elevating Joseph to second in command over Egypt in order to save the people of God from starvation.

Genesis 50:20 - *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*

Think of Elisha:

2 Kings 6:15-17 - *When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and **chariots** had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked. ¹⁶ "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." ¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and **chariots** of fire all around Elisha.*

And of course, think of Jesus:

Acts 2:22-23 - *"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³ This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and **foreknowledge**; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.*

This life is not all there is. Our earthly perspective is so limited, and often so deceiving. We need God to open our eyes to the spiritual reality:

1 Corinthians 2:13-14 - *This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. ¹⁴ The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are **spiritually discerned**.*

2 Corinthians 3:15-16 - *Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. ¹⁶ But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.*

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 - *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ The god of this age has **blinded** the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

Ephesians 1:17-19 - *I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe.*

One of the main purposes of Revelation was to open their eyes and our eyes to what is going on in the spiritual realm, in order to encourage us and help us to trust in the Lord through difficult times. I don't know what you are going through, but trust that there is an unseen, spiritual reality behind what your eyes can see. Lord, open our eyes to see and know you and to know the spiritual reality.

2) There is an eternal, sovereign God.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth

The biggest part of the spiritual reality is that there is a God who is the alpha and the omega – the A and Z. He was there in the beginning and will be there in the end. He was, he is, and he is to come – he is the eternal one, transhistorical perspective. He stands outside of time. He knows the end from the beginning. He can speak with confidence about what is to come. Remember the name of God:

Exodus 3:13-14 - *Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" ¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"*

I am the always existent one. In other words, we don't know the future, but we know the one who holds the future in His hands. Jesus is the ruler of the kings of the earth. As our friend and former missionary Ray Labbe would say, "Is Jesus still

on the throne? Then I must be okay.” Whatever is happening in our lives, it is not out of his sovereignty.

Romans 8:28-29 - *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

3) There is a Lord and Savior, Jesus the Messiah

This is the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

*Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. **To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,** ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father-- to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.*

"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

He is our Savior, who has conquered sin and death.

John 3:16-18 - *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*

He is not only our Savior, but our Lord. Keep your eyes on Him. Take it to heart. Trust in Him. Follow in His footsteps. *Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.*

Look to Him not only as Savior but as Lord, as example, as the one you follow.

In the persecution, in the confusion, in the suffering, remember that there is a spiritual perspective, that God is on the throne, and that there is a Lord and Savior, Jesus.