

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST: THE KING

Behold, He Is Coming!

Revelation 1:1-8

Mark Vroegop

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near. John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Rev. 1:1-8, ESV)

One of my favorite scenes in the classic movie *The Wizard of Oz* is toward the end of the movie when Dorothy, the Lion, Tin Man, Scarecrow, and Toto stand before the "great and powerful Oz." They've been promised that the Wizard of Oz would help them if they were able to destroy the Wicked Witch. Dorothy brings the witch's broom as evidence that they've defeated her, and she holds Oz to his promise.

As they stand in the grand hall with smoke, fire, and a floating green image, The Great and Terrible Oz attempts a delay. He thunders, "Come back tomorrow," with more smoke and fire. Dorothy protests, "If you were really great, you'd keep your promises." More intimidating sounds.

Meanwhile the little dog Toto leaves the group and begins pulling back a curtain. After two pulls it reveals a man moving levers, yelling into a microphone, and frantically trying to hide himself. And then comes the famous line: "Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain."

It's a great line, isn't it? When the curtain is pulled back, the command is to ignore what they see. When the truth was revealed, the command was "Don't pay attention to him."

The book of Revelation is a moment when the curtain of life is pulled back. But when we are given a glimpse of what is really happening, the message is entirely the opposite: "Pay attention to God-man behind the curtain."

Welcome to our first of twenty-three messages about “The Revelation of Jesus Christ,” an exciting journey through one of the most complicated, confusing, and important books in the New Testament. From this Sunday through April of next year, we’ll be walking through about a chapter per week as we examine the biblical vision of the completion of God’s redemptive plan.

I’d love to have you read along with us each week so that you can come prepared, and I think this series would be a good one on which to take careful notes. There’s a lot to learn

Today we are only covering the first eight verses, and we’ll be taking a broad overview approach of the entire book. We’ll examine the content and message of these first few verses, but we’ll also consider some thoughts about how to approach the book.

What Is Revelation About?

The title of today’s sermon comes right out of verse 7: “Behold, he is coming!” And to begin our journey, I want you to consider this question with me: “What is Revelation about?” To answer that question, let me highlight four themes: 1) Revelation, 2) Hope, 3) Judgment, and 4) Reassurance.

1) Revelation

Yes, the book of Revelation is about revelation. We see this in the first five verses: “the revelation of Jesus Christ.” This book is about the second coming of Jesus, which is the culmination of God’s redemptive plan. Sometimes theologians summarize the big-picture themes of the Bible with four words: Creation – Fall – Redemption – Restoration. The book of Revelation is about this final moment in salvation history. It’s a book about what is yet to come – the future.

The Greek word for revelation is apokalypsis. That probably sounds familiar, but it probably evokes scenes of destruction and devastation. “Those storm clouds look apocalyptic!” You can probably think of some movies that fit the genre in our culture. They’re dark and foreboding.

But in the Bible, apocalypse means something hidden being revealed or the disclosure of what’s unseen. That’s why the word revelation works. This book pulls back the curtain to show us what is really happening and what will happen. Jesus used the same word when affirming Peter’s statement that Jesus he was the Christ in Matthew 16:17 – “...flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” Revelation helps us see what is really happening when the perspective of heaven is involved.

Verse 1 also says, “which God gave him to show his servants the things that must soon take place.” Many people think of the book as a mysterious predictor of future events. While it’s true that there’s much in the book about the future, it’s important to remember that this is the revelation of Jesus Christ. It’s the revealing of his return to finish the work begun in the resurrection. Many people think this book is about when Jesus will return. But it’s more about who is coming, what it will be like, and why it’s important.

The purpose of this book is not knowledge although there's a lot to understand. This purpose of this book is to point believers toward the coming victory of Jesus so that they'll faithfully endure through times of difficulty, suffering, and persecution.

Nancy Guthrie in her book *Blessed: Experiencing the Promise of the Book of Revelation*, says:

Revelation was written to fortify Christians to live in the world, enduring its harsh treatment and alienation, with a firm confidence that this world is not all there is, and that, in fact, what may seem like defeat is going to give way to victory. If...we can explain every symbol, identify every Old Testament allusion, and trace every connection but are still intimidated by the world's opinion of us, still enamoured with the world's wealth, still attracted by the world's comfort and pleasure, then we will not have truly heard and kept its message.¹

This book reveals a battle raging between heaven and earth, between Satan and God, between believers in Jesus and a hostile world. It pulls back the curtain to help us understand what is really going on and where history is headed. Revelation reveals the path for endurance. Revelation shows us there's really a massive bloody battle happening in the universe. It shows us what's really going on and where things are headed.

The book was a record of the revelation given to the apostle John during his exile on the island of Patmos. I'll say more about this next week, but just remember this revelation was given to an apostle who felt the oppression of evil in the world. He was living it, and this book was meant to strengthen him as well as the churches to whom he wrote.

Verse 2 identifies that John wrote what he saw. Apocalyptic literature, like Revelation, parts of Daniel, Ezekiel, Matthew, and Mark, are intended to reveal a message through imagery and symbols. Part of the challenge of interpreting the book is knowing when to take something merely as a symbol, when to take it literally, and then how to apply it.

As a result, there are a number of ways that Bible-believing Christians approach the book of Revelation. For our study, I'm going to be sure that we don't lose the forest for the trees. I'm preaching a sermon not teaching a class. So, I'm not going to answer all your questions. I'll try to highlight different perspectives on various issues, and I may tip my hand often to tell you what I think. But there are other Christians within our church and even pastors within our staff who see things differently.

That may be a bit uncomfortable for some of you. However, not every issue in the Bible has the same degree of importance. Sometimes this is called theological triage – the weighting of a variety of issues to get them in the right order of importance. When I taught through Romans 14-15, I highlighted the distinction between absolutes, convictions, and preferences. The second coming of Jesus is an absolute. As is the reality of heaven and hell. These are essential doctrines of the Christian faith. The timing of Christ's return, whether there's a literal millennial kingdom, and the role of Israel are examples of secondary issues – some degree of conviction or even preference. We'll talk about these as we move

¹ Nancy Guthrie, *Blessed: Experiencing the Promise of the Book of Revelation*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022), 23.

forward, but it is important to remember that this book needs to be read through this lens, and we need to treat one another with charity. Keep in mind that Satan is our enemy, not the dispensationalists or amillennialists. You may have strong views about the rapture or the church replacing Israel, but don't forget that our real hope isn't about being right. It's about the return of Christ our King.

Keep your eyes fixed on this singular theme: The Revelation of Jesus Christ.

2) Hope

The second theme is woven throughout the entire book, but we get a clear sense that Revelation is written to inspire hope in God's people as they are experiencing hardship and difficulty.

Verse 3 calls out a blessing on the person reading this prophesy and the person hearing it. As we'll see in verse 4, the book of Revelation was a letter circulated among seven churches. Before there were printed Bibles, an inspired letter like this would have been brought to a church. They would have gathered together and listened as it was read. So the first blessing is for the person taking that responsibility.

But there's also a blessing for those who hear the book and keep what is written. Hearing alone wasn't the goal. Revelation is written so that it can be kept. Now that's an interesting thing to say because there's a lot more description than prescription in this book. It's not a letter from the apostle Paul that has command after command. The vision of Revelation is that God's people will keep his word to the very end and with a sense of urgency – "for the time is near."

In verse 4 we see that this is a letter from John to seven churches that are Asia (modern day Turkey). Now there are more than seven churches in this region. For example, the church at Colossae is in this region. It's not far from Laodicea, but it's not mentioned. It may be that these were churches with which John had some connection. They are real churches, but they are meant to be representative of all the churches. Perhaps that's why he uses the number seven – a number associated with divine perfection and completeness.

They are given a standard greeting: "Grace to you and peace..." But what follows is an essential part of Revelation: "from him who was and who is and who is to come..." This wording occurs in four other places (Rev. 1:8, 4:8, 11:17, 16:5). This is a word of comfort about God's control of the past, the present, and the future.

Grant Osborne says, "God's eternal power, already seen in the past and guaranteed in the future, is still at work in the present, even if for a time he is allowing the forces of evil to have their day."² This is a different kind of revelation. It's connecting the present to God's being in the past and in the future. It's similar to what Isaac Watts wrote in the last stanza of O God, Our Help in Ages Past:

² Grant R. Osborne, [Revelation](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 61.

O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
still be our guard while troubles last,
and our eternal home!³

What's more, we see the seven spirits mentioned that may be connected to the description in Isaiah 11:2 or Zechariah 4:2. And this message of hope is coming from Jesus, who is described with three important phrases:

- The faithful witness – Jesus is the model of those who testify and are persecuted
- The firstborn from the dead – he has conquered death with more to come
- The ruler of the kings of the earth – the earthly rulers are subservient to the King of Kings

It's an incredible reminder about who Jesus is. And I hope as we make our way through this book, you'll find your heart elevated in love and worship of Jesus. The more that's revealed about him, the more you should love him.

Christian, let the book of Revelation increase your affection for our soon-coming King.

Finally, this section on hope ends with a glorious and encouraging doxology. It's rich with redemptive hope: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

All this is already completed. It's a reminder about who they are. Oh, how much this is needed when you are facing opposition. Fear, anxiety, confusion, and pain cloud the mind. The heart grows faint when it seems like you are losing all the time. Revelation reminds us of who Jesus is and who we are when the world is falling apart.

3) Judgment

The third theme that we'll find in this book is judgment – the divine accountability for what's wrong with the world. We'll see this take on greater focus after chapter 6. But we get a sense of it in 1:7.

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen (Rev. 1:7).

John highlights here that the return of Jesus is going to be glorious for those who know him. And it will be frightening for those who do not. Jesus presently is the open-armed redeemer. He's ready to forgive, cleanse, and make new. But that's not forever. There is coming a day when he will come as conqueror, judge, and king.

³ https://hymnary.org/text/our_god_our_help_in_ages_past_watts

Those on the wrong side of God's holiness and Jesus' justice will be in a frightening position. Revelation warns us about this. And it also reminds believers that there is a coming day when Jesus will make everything right. That's why we read: "Even so. Amen."

If Jesus comes in judgment, we can endure the brokenness of the world, its opposition, the onslaught of the devil, and unfair treatment. We can look to our coming king and release our need to take our own justice.

4) Reassurance

Our opening verses bring us back to a theme that we'll see throughout our journey. John will see incredible visions of the glory and majesty of God. This vision of who God is will fuel his endurance. But his vision is not merely intellectual or theological. John knows that God is sovereign and in control of all the events of the world.

Yet what he sees impacts him deeply. The images and scenes and creatures are all meant to create emotions within him and his readers. The vision of Revelation is designed to push through the fog of true but stuffy theology. The message of this book is designed to be the new melody that takes over the painful dissonance of a broken world. The hope of Revelation is designed to welcome us into the reassurance of Jesus' embrace when we've been stiff-armed by the world or colleagues or friends or family.

Revelation doesn't just tell us something reassuring; it declares it! Imagine John hearing this alone on the island of Patmos thinking his life is over:

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8).

Eugene Peterson suggests how images of Jesus must have given John hope:

St. John, away from his churches, fretting from lack of intimate knowledge of his people sees the penetrating, attentive eyes of his Savior. St. John, weak from confinement, sees the strong, burnished feet of his Lord. St. John, used to speaking with authority to apt-to-stray sheep but now without voice, hears the authoritative voice of the Ruler of church and world. St. John, homesick for his congregations, sees them held in the right hand of the Shepherd of Israel. St. John at the mercy of the political sword of Rome, sees the word of God proceeding swordlike and not returning void. St. John, nearing the end of his days, the energy of his countenance in eclipse, sees the presence of a radiating Christ throwing blessing on all.⁴

What is this book about? Revelation, Hope, Judgment, and Reassurance.

⁴ Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination*, (New York: Harper One, 1988, 41.)

God pulls back the curtain between heaven and earth. We can see what is really going on. We get a glimpse of what is going to happen. And all of this is that we can make it – like Jesus did.

Behold! He's coming on the clouds.

Pay attention to the God-man behind the curtain!

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