

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST: THE END

Review

Revelation 1-22

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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. 1:4-8).

Our journey through the book of Revelation comes to an end today.

It's always an interesting moment when we close a sermon series. Preaching through particular books of the Bible tend to serve like monuments to God's work in our church. Fifteen years ago, I started my role at College Park with a sermon series on the book of Colossians with the theme "The Core." It helped us develop our mission statement: *Igniting a passion to follow Jesus.*

We've walked through other notable books like Job, Exodus, Lamentations, Romans, Matthew, James, and Isaiah – to name a few. Each of these books has a unique place in this life of our church, and they have a special place in my life.

When I announced that we were going to study Revelation in the summer of 2022, there was an audible gasp of excitement and apprehension. It's an intimidating book, and I surely felt that throughout this series. Yet, it has been so helpful to my soul, and I trust to yours as well.

The Lord led me to Revelation because I felt it would be a helpful book as we moved into a new season of ministry after several years of challenges combined with all kinds of challenges in our society and culture. In some respects, Revelation feels as monumental as Colossians because it seems like the fall of 2022 marked the start of new season of ministry in our church.

Revelation has helped us to keep Jesus central while striving for faithfulness in a post-Christian world. It's been a book filled with hope, but also a book with sober warnings. Revelation pushes the limits of our imagination with view to inspire our endurance.

This book is about the revelation of Jesus Christ to help God's people (us) to remain faithful. This book shows us the future and what is really going on in the world to remind Christians that "it's going to be okay." "We're going to make it." Revelation shows us that Jesus is coming soon.

Today's sermon is going to be a high-level overview of the book to help us celebrate and commemorate the work of the Spirit in our lives through the book of Revelation.

The series was divided into four sections: The King, The Victor, The Rebellion, and The End. Let's look at each of these.

The King (Ch. 1-3)

The first three chapters give us the thematic summary of the book. In chapter 1, along with letters to seven churches, we learned about the major themes of the book. We heard specific applications to real churches (just like ours) that faced a lot of challenges.

The opening verses highlight some critical elements for this book:

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 (Rev. 1:1-3).

Revelation is written for those who are committed to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. And the purpose is to help Christians to "keep" what is written in this book. This vision is designed to help you make it, to be obedient, and to face opposition and persecution. Revelation is meant to inspire Christians to be more righteous, more faithful, and to look more like Jesus.

If you've understood this book, you should be able to see specific ways that you are different. So, let's just stop for a moment and ask ourselves how this vision of Jesus Christ has changed you. How are you different today because of your encounter with this book?

Another thing that I'll never forget is the statement, "...blessed are those who hear..." This book was read aloud to churches, and to help you feel the significance of this we invited people to recite from memory the scripture for each Sunday. The original idea was to try it for a few weeks, but by the fourth week we sensed the Spirit really using it. So, we continued every week throughout this series. I'm sure that you found it as inspiring and weighty as I did.

This first chapter provided the spiritual theme for Revelation:

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 1:4-8).

Jesus is the faithful witness, the first born of the dead, and ruler of the kings on earth. He's coming back. And John saw an incredible vision of Jesus that informs the rest of the book:

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades (Rev. 1:12-18).

It's a stunning image that captures the strength, power, majesty, and eternity of Jesus. In a word, this is glory—the kind of spiritual weightiness that takes over everything else. The book of Revelation shows us what Jesus is really like. In a world filled with chaos, brokenness, and sin, this is a stunning and hopeful image.

It's a reminder that our hope is not just in a better future. Our hope is in the return of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

This hope isn't theoretical. It's personal and local. Christians long for Jesus to return. But individual churches desire for him to come as they are facing unique challenges in the places where they are planted. That's why the seven letters are so important. They show us that the call for faithfulness needs to be lived out in different locations with unique circumstances.

When we looked at the seven churches, I suggested to you that every one of these letters has applications for us to consider—"let he who has an ear let him hear." While each letter has applicability, I was particularly struck with the letter to the church at Ephesus and the concern about leaving our first love.

One commentator says:

The Ephesian converts had known such a love in their early years; but their struggle with false teachers and their hatred of heretical teaching had apparently engendered hard feelings and

*harsh attitudes toward one another to such an extent that it amounted to a forsaking of the supreme Christian virtue of love.*¹

Their zeal for orthodoxy led them to be unloving toward God and others. The early days of their enthusiasm for spiritual things and their care for one another diminished. The stress of hardship and opposition caused their affections for God and others to deflate.

If we're honest (if I'm honest), the hardship, opposition, and even our own failures can create a cold-hearted cynicism. It's not only easy to be hardened; you can become harsh. It's possible to become a grumpy Christian with no joy, no faith, and no love.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ reminds us that he's the King, and we're called to love him.

The Victor (Ch. 4-11)

The scene shifts in chapter 4. We're given a glimpse of what is happening behind the scenes of human history. John invites us, even challenges us, to pay attention to the man behind the curtain.

In chapters 4-5, we saw the throne in heaven with creatures and twenty-four elders surrounding it. Worship is the constant activity: *"Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created"* (Rev. 4:11).

Chapter 5 focuses this worship as we are told about a slain Lamb who enters the scene to take a scroll which symbolizes the providential plan of God. When the Lamb takes the scroll, heaven breaks out in glorious praise:

And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:9-10).

It's a glorious vision. The world is marked by division, separation, and collective power along these lines of tribe, language, people, and nation. Wars are fought along these lines. Senses of superiority and partiality follow the well-worn pathways of tribe, language, people, and nation. The punishment at the Tower of Babel was a scattered people with different languages. And now we see the power of redemption to destroy this worldly stronghold and unite people through the redemption in Jesus.

This victorious vision is one of the reasons why reaching unreached peoples and working toward ethnic harmony are an important part of following Jesus. They both aren't easy, and they both won't be completed until Jesus comes back, but they are worth working toward even now. The Lamb is worthy!

¹ Grant R. Osborne, [*Revelation*](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 115.

On the heels of this celebration of worship, the seals of judgment are opened. Chapters 6-11 unfold an important theme that we heard repeatedly. Jesus comes as Savior and as Judge. You can't read Revelation without seeing the prominence of the message of judgment. Jesus's victory is over sin, death, and the devil. But it's applied anywhere the curse of sin is found, and it's particularly mentioned over and over as a warning for those who are on the wrong side of God.

Jesus doesn't redeem the world by removing his followers and taking us to another planet or galaxy. Jesus returns to judge the world. He saves through judgment. Here's how Revelation 11 summarizes this theme and weaves worship into it:

And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth" (Rev. 11:16-18).

Revelation reminds us that there is no salvation without judgment. Jesus's victory began with God's judgment being poured out on him. His victory is completed through divine judgment.

The Rebellion (Ch. 12-18)

The third section of Revelation is the darkest and most foreboding. Chapters 12-18 show us the rebellion and opposition of the world against the righteousness of Jesus. These chapters identify that there's a darkness in the world that rebels against the glory of God.

In chapter 12 we learned about a woman and a dragon. The woman represented the people of God and the dragon represented the devil. It symbolized the continual conflict that exists in the world as the dragon seeks to devour the woman's child and destroy her.

When the dragon does not immediately succeed, he uses two beasts to do his diabolical bidding: the Antichrist (first beast) and the False Prophet (second beast). These two individuals utilize politics and religion to persecute God's people and to continue the opposition of the devil.

And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation..." (Rev. 13:5-7).

As powerful as these beasts are, God's people are sealed with his name so that they can endure to the end. After more judgments in chapters 14-16, we learned about the Great Prostitute who was a symbol for Babylon, the system of man-made rebellion against God (Rev. 17). The world loves this system, and it participates and benefits from her rebellion.

Do you remember the warning? Another goal is to awaken your spiritual senses to where we really live and what is really going on. Do you sense that happening through this book? I hope so. Because to understand and appreciate this part of the vision in Revelation 17 would mean a greater awareness of the seduction and pervasiveness of sin in our world. And since it's widespread and appealing to our fleshly instincts, we need a blunt image to wake us up and remind us of what's really going on.

Chapter 18 recounts and celebrates the fall of Babylon. Judgment will be shockingly swift – “a single day” – and it will be devastating. A kingdom and system that seems so powerful and strong will be toppled and destroyed almost instantly. All the proud pronouncements about glory and grandeur will be silenced. The trust in military might will be shattered. The security of financial systems will collapse. And it will be a stunning upheaval of what human beings trust in.

If your life was tied to the Babylon system, then its demise was a disaster. But if your life is connected to the King of kings and Lord of lords, you have a very different view of the fall of Babylon. This is really important! Do you know why? Because when the world and its system starts to fall, the majority of people are in panic, fearful, and mourning. The world as they knew it is collapsing. Christians live for another kingdom, and this becomes very evident when earthly kingdoms totter.

The End (Ch. 19-22)

The final chapters bring to conclusion God's redemptive plan. Jesus returns on a white horse. There's an image of him that reminds us of chapter 1:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:11-16).

After reigning during the millennial kingdom, Satan is defeated once and for all. He's thrown into the lake of fire and every human being is judged. The books are open, and those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life are welcomed into God's kingdom.

And then this book ends with a marvelous description of the new heaven and the new earth, along with the New Jerusalem.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:3-4).

This is the glorious end of God's redemptive plan. It's a message designed to strengthen the faithfulness of those who trust in Jesus. The aim of this vision is to help us persevere as the world falls apart.

But it's also an invitation to those who have yet to put their trust in Jesus. Revelation pleads, yet again, for you to turn from your sins, invite Jesus to be your Savior, and confess him as King of kings and Lord of lords.

I end this sermon with the inspired words of this glorious book:

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen (Rev. 22:20-21).

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