

Are We Living in the Last Days?
Series: Elephant in the Room #1
Revelation 1:1-20; I JOHN 2:18-27

Introduction:

I heard about a man who had a grandfather clock that went haywire and chimed fourteen times one midnight. He jumped up and said, "Wake up, Nellie, it's later than it's ever been before!" I believe it's later than it's ever been before because we are living in the last hour.

In 1814, Ivan Krylov (1769–1844), wrote a fable entitled "The Inquisitive Man", which tells of a man who goes to a museum and notices all sorts of tiny things, but fails to notice an elephant.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. In September of 2006, a British artist named, Banksy, wanted to illustrate how we ignore big problems. So, he painted this picture. [Show picture] You will note the elephant is painted in the same bold pattern as the room's wallpaper. His point was to make the elephant so big that you couldn't miss it and yet let it blend into the wallpaper so you could ignore it, if you wanted to. It's the whole idea of the elephant in the room.

The Oxford English Dictionary gives the first recorded use of the phrase, as a simile, in The New York Times on June 20, 1959: "Financing schools has become a problem about equal to having an elephant in the living room. It's so big you just can't ignore it."

The Elephant in the Room is the title I'm using for a sermon series I'm starting today.

That phrase according to the Urban Dictionary is "*a very large issue that everyone is acutely aware of, but nobody wants to talk about.*" My message today is one that almost every Christian is curious about. **"Are We Living in the Last Days?"**

I recently heard that Revelation is the book of the Bible that church members want their pastor to preach on the most, because **they don't understand it**. AND it's the book that pastors preach the least because...**they don't understand it!**

I haven't preached much from Revelation, partly because I've seen it misused so often. I've seen people become obsessed with matching up the prophecies of Revelation with current events. Back in the 1980s, I remember

people saying that Mikhail Gorbachev was the Antichrist-remember the birthmark on his head? People said that was the mark of the beast.

Throughout history many names have been suggested. Here are a few other people who have been nominated as the Antichrist.

Roman Emperor Nero
The Pope
Napoleon
Adolph Hitler
Joseph Stalin
John F. Kennedy
Aleister Crowley (One of the fathers of modern Satanism)
Ayatollah Khomeini
Ronald Reagan
Saddam Hussein
Bill Clinton
Bill Gates
George W. Bush
Barak Obama
Barney the Dinosaur (just seeing if you are listening)

When the European Union was formed, people said those first ten nations were the 10-horns of the beast of Revelation chapter 17. (Now, I believe the European Union is up to 27 nations, so I'm not sure how that fits).

Then they said Revelation predicted Y2K, and that was going to be the end of the world. How many times have we heard expert after expert predict dates when Jesus would return, and the days have come and gone?

So, what does the Bible say about the last days? The Bible defines the last days as the first coming to the second coming of Christ. So, are we living in the last days? Yes. Maybe you are thinking, but surely now we are living in the very last days, right?

Here is a little of what Jesus said in Matthew 24 (NIV)

36 "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be

taken and the other left.

42 “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. (NIV)

Revelation was written to a group of churches in the first century. Did you realize that? It contains a lot of prophecy, but it's a letter addressed to a group of churches. And if I had to quickly summarize the message to these churches, as well as to our church, here's what I would say:

1. **The world is getting more corrupt, immoral, evil, sinful, etc.**
(You know what I mean, so put whatever word you want there)
2. **Opposition to Christ and His church is getting greater & more intense.**
3. **God is in control, and when all is said and done, He is victorious.**
4. **So, Christ-followers need to stand firm in their faith until the end.**

Let me say that one more time-here's what I believe is the message of Revelation: The world is getting darker. Opposition to Christ and His church is getting greater. But God is in control, and in the end God wins. So, stand firm in your faith.

That's the message God gave to seven churches back in the year 95AD. And this is the message we need to hear today.

I have seen our culture grow further away from God and the truth of His word. Many people are turning toward secularism; the belief that everything can be explained through science; we don't need faith in God. People are caught up in radical individualism: I'm not responsible to God or to other people; I'm only responsible to be true to myself and express my identity.

Our culture worships the god of Mammon, and pursues a life of comfort, immorality, and materialism. And the list could go on. And as those changes are taking place, we see levels of fear and hopelessness skyrocket; addictions and suicides are way up...this world is a mess!

And amid all these changes, churches, and Christians, who used to be looked at as part of the solution to the world's problems, now, more than ever are perceived as part of the problem.

The world is getting darker. You might be feeling some of that darkness in your own family, or in your own personal life. Opposition to Christ and his church is getting greater. So don't be surprised when that happens! But here's what you need to know: **God is in control, and in the end He wins. So, stand firm in your faith, and be encouraged today.**

At the outset, it looks like the church is losing ground, but Revelation reminds us that Jesus is building His church, just like He promised, and the gates of hell will not prevail. On the surface it's going to look like we are on the wrong side of history. But Revelation reminds us that God is the One who writes history. So, stand firm in your faith. Hold on to Jesus and get ready for a wild ride.

That's the message of Revelation, and we need to hear it, and hopefully we will be **less intimidated** by the darkness, and **more amazed** with Jesus.

So, let's read Revelation chapter one, from the NIV...

1 The revelation from 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 aloud 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.

4 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 (or seven-fold spirit) 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 peoples on 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.”

9 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 The hair on his head was 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 coming out of his mouth was 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 now look, 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. (NIV)

Let's break this down into two parts: The Victory that is in Christ, and The Vision that Changes Us.

Revelation chapter one, verse one starts out like this: **The revelation from Jesus Christ**. Literally, the Greek says, The revelation OF Jesus Christ. And if you think about it, that phrase could have two meanings. It could mean that this book is FROM Jesus, like, He's the one giving us this revelation. But it could also mean this is a book ABOUT Jesus, meaning it's a revelation of Him.

So that simple phrase, "**The Revelation of Jesus Christ**" could either mean Jesus is the giver of the revelation, or He's the actual content of the revelation. OR...it could mean both. **I believe it means both.**

What we read in Revelation is **from** Jesus, and it's **about** Jesus. If we're going to be less intimidated by fear in the Last Days and more confident in our faith, we must see Jesus.

Let's keep reading: **The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.** So, **there's a definite future orientation to Revelation.** **He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw...** Revelation was written by John, the apostle of love. This is the same John who was one of Jesus' twelve disciples. The brother of James. John wrote the gospel of John, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John as well as Revelation. And by this time, John was an old man.

Now-look ahead to verse 9: ***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.

John wrote this letter as a prisoner, in exile on an Island called Patmos. Patmos is a tiny island off the west coast of Turkey; it's part of Greece today. But John was sent there because he chose to give his allegiance to Jesus instead of Cesar. There may have been other prisoners on the island, but probably not many. In other words, John needed this message of encouragement as much as anybody.

So, John, testifies to everything he saw, that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. **Verse 3: *Blessed is the one who reads aloud 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.*** So, there's a sense of urgency that runs through this whole book: the time is near. Don't get complacent. Don't say, "I've got plenty of time to get right with God." The time is near. Today is the day of salvation.

Verse 4: ***John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia...*** And down in verse 11, he's going to name the seven cities where those churches are located. Now: there were lots of churches in Asia, **so why those seven?**

Seven is a number you see all throughout the bible and in the book of Revelation, because seven is a number that symbolized completion. I believe those seven churches represent every church. And many theologians see those seven churches as seven ages of church history with the church at Laodicea being the church representing our age – **a lukewarm church.**

But here's what you need to know: **these churches were living through times of incredible persecution.**

It really started to get bad when Nero was the emperor in 64AD; he blamed the burning of Rome on the Christians, and persecution broke out. In the years after that, Christians were thrown to the lions; they were covered in tar and publicly lit on fire; they were forced to make sacrifices to Roman Gods under threat of death. We get bent out of shape when someone says "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas"; but we have no idea what some people have suffered because of Jesus. So, these were people who desperately needed the message of encouragement in this letter.

John starts his letter to the churches in verse 4 with a familiar salutation, ***"Grace and Peace"***

This introduction is used 18 times in the New Testament in letters to churches

Church is intended to be a place of Grace

Grace means the favor and blessings of God

We do not deserve the grace of God, but God loves us enough that He wants to show us grace.

We live in a world of earning, deserving, and merit, and these result in judgment. Judgment kills. Only grace makes alive.

Grace is a blessing that we do not deserve.

Ephesians 2:8-9: For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. (NIV)

Grace is freely given by God and should be at the core of the Church

Every one of us here today need Grace!

Church is also intended to be a place of Peace

Church should show us that we can have peace with God

God is seeking peace with us. This only comes by seeking His mercy and grace. Church is intended to help us find the peace of God.

Peace also means that men no longer must be divided, separated, and discriminated against; nor do they have to be fighting, warring, stealing, and killing each other. Man can now have peace—peace with God, the peace of God, and peace with each other.

The church is intended to show the world that Grace and Peace can only come through Jesus Christ.

Grace and Peace to you from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come.

Isn't that an awesome phrase? It covers the present, the past and the future. And for the next few verses, it talks about how Jesus is victorious in the present, the past, and the future. Jesus went from Rejection, to Abandonment, to Crucifixion, to Resurrection, to Glorification.

**In verse 13 John describes seeing Jesus in the midst of the seven lampstands
In verse 20 we are told the seven lampstands represents the seven churches**

The lampstand in the temple was made of pure Gold and was meant to give light to the Holy Place. The church is to be the light in a darkened world.

Illustration: Years ago, a tornado destroyed a little church on the coast of England. The congregation was too poor to replace it. One day a representative of the British Admiralty called on the local minister. The official inquired if his people planned to rebuild. The pastor explained their situation. Whereupon the caller said, "If you do not rebuild the church, we will. That spire is on all our charts and maps. It is the landmark by which the ships of the seven seas steer their courses."

Dick Halverson, the Chaplain of the Senate, from 1981 to 1995 said:

In the beginning the church was a fellowship of men and women centering on the living Christ. Then the church moved to Greece where it became a philosophy. Then it moved to Rome where it became an institution. Next, it moved to Europe where it became a culture. And, finally, it moved to America where it became an enterprise.

The most important part of these verses for the Church is that Jesus is in the midst of the lampstands (candlesticks)

We can learn 3 objectives for the church from this

1. The Church is intended to be about Christ

2. The Church is intended to get its light from Christ

Christ stands in the midst of the candlesticks, and unless Jesus stands in the midst of the church, the church has no light. Without Christ, the church cannot be what it is intended to be.

3. The message of the Church is intended to focus on Christ

Catch this vision as John describes our victorious Christ

1. The faithful witness – The one we can depend upon

John 8:14 - Jesus answered and said to them, ***“Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going.” (ESV)***

2. The firstborn from the dead – First to arise and never die again

The word "firstborn" means to be the first in rank; to be supreme. He is the Son of God; therefore, His resurrection is the supreme and preeminent resurrection. Because He arose, we too shall arise if we believe that He died

and arose for us.

Colossians 1:18 - **18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.” (ESV)**

3. Ruler over the Kings of the Earth – Jesus is in control

Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of God's throne. He alone has been given the seat of Sovereign rule over the earth.

1 Timothy 1:17 - **To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.**

4. Redeemer – He has cleansed and washed us

The word "washed" means to be loosed, set free, and released from sin. Jesus lived a sinless and perfect life as a Man upon earth. Therefore, God accepts His death as the perfect sacrifice for sin. We stand before God free of sin and acceptable to Him, by the shed blood of Jesus Christ upon the cross.

Galatians 1:3-5 - **Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (ESV)**

5. Exalted us – Made us Kings and Priests

2 Timothy 2:12 - **If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. (ESV)**

6. The Alpha and the Omega

Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and Omega the last letter. That is, Jesus Christ is the beginning and the ending of all there is. All things find their purpose, meaning, and significance in Him.

7. Who is and who was and who is to come

That is, He is eternal and unchangeable. Today He is the same Person He has always been and shall always be.

His love is unchangeable. But so are His justice and judgment. If we trust Him,

we shall know His love; if we reject Him, we shall know His wrath.

Hebrews 1:10-12 - **““You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; 11 they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, 12 like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.” (ESV)**

8. Almighty

Hebrews 1:1-4 - **In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. 4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. (NIV)**

1. The church is intended to be about Christ
2. Church cannot exist without Christ
3. He wants us to be His light to a dark world

In closing today, I want you to see John's reaction to this revelation of Jesus.

17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. 18 I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.

John, the beloved disciple, was awestruck by the presence of Jesus. And so should we. Christians get caught up in who is the antichrist...when will the rapture take place...does America play a part in the end times?

Let me ask, what would you do if you knew who the antichrist was?

Let me say it again. The world is getting darker. Opposition to Christ and His church is getting greater. But God is in control, and in the end God wins. So, we must stand firm in your faith. And we can do that because our mighty champion, the Lord Jesus Christ is with us and will never leave us.

