

Are You Ready for a Blessing?

Revelation Series #1

Revelation 1

Introduction: Story from foyer last week...Are you ready for school? And then with school starting with have this other thing that starts in the fall called football. Hank Williams Jr. asked the question, are you ready for some football?

But my question for you today is...**Are you ready for a blessing?** Today I'm starting a series on Revelation, the last book in the bible.

For thousands of years, people have longed to know what the future holds. Is there going to be a day when life as we know it ends? What does the Bible say about things to come?

Jesus' own disciples had these kinds of questions rolling around in their heads. One day as they were walking out of the temple, the disciples commented to Jesus about the amazing beauty of the temple structure that Herod had built for the Jews. Jesus replied, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down" (Matthew 24:2). The disciples were flabbergasted at this statement ... and it caused them to ask Jesus about the future. "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3).

Like everyone else, they desired to know the future and how near they were to the end. Are we really living in the last days?

Preachers have been talking about the end of the world for a long time. Street preachers even wear large sandwich board signs which read, "The End is Near." Are they correct? Is Gabriel licking his lips, getting ready to blow the trumpet? Is Jesus coming soon?

It's interesting how age affects your feelings toward the second coming of Jesus and the end of the world. When you are middle aged and older, you tend to want Jesus to come today. You pray the prayer of John the Apostle from Revelation 22:20, "**Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**"

But those who are younger and have their whole life ahead of them tend to pray more like this: "You know, Lord, I want you to come soon ... but not too soon. Lord, I really want to experience the joys of marriage and family before You return."

As far as timing goes, rest assured that the Lord is in control. Jesus came to this earth the first time at the perfect time ... and He will do the same with His second coming. He will come again at precisely the right time. How do I know? Easy. God is never late and never in a hurry. He is always perfect in what He says, what He does, and when He does it.

Now regarding exactly when He is going to return, no man knows or can know the date. History is littered with the errors of so-called prophets who said, "Jesus is coming on such and such a date." No one knows. Jesus made that point crystal clear in Matthew 24:36, **"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone"**

Jesus doesn't even know the exact time of the second coming. That is the Father's special secret, and it plays perfectly into the **Jewish wedding custom in which the father alone determined the time for his son to get his bride.** Did you know that?

Notice it's not Revelations, plural, it's Revelation, singular, meaning the revealing, the uncovering of Jesus Christ that was given to John on the Isle of Patmos. And it's the only book in the bible that comes with a guaranteed blessing. It says in Revelation 1, 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."**

There is a blessing to be had if we **read**, if we **hear**, and **take to heart** what is written in this book. If we do those three things, read, hear, and take it to heart, God says there is a great blessing in store for you and me.

Now Revelation is one of the books that many people avoid. People say I can't make heads or tails of that stuff...it is so difficult to understand. But we need to remember it is the revelation of Jesus Christ...it is the unveiling of Jesus Christ. It is making a mystery known. So, its not that God is trying to

make the end-time mystery harder to understand, He is trying to pull the cover off the mystery to make it known.

One of the things that make Revelation hard to understand is that it is filled with symbolism. It talks about a dragon...it talks about a beast...seven heads...seven seals...ten crowns...horns and everything else. Here is the thing about Revelation, it is filled with symbolism, but once you understand what the symbols stand for you can discern what it means.

There is a world ruler coming described as a beast rising out of the sea. That is symbolic language, and we want to uncover these symbols in this series.

This book was given to John on the Isle of Patmos. The Island of Patmos in John's Day was like Alcatraz. Patmos was known as part of the Sporades islands, a group of remote islands used for exiling (banishing) people that were somehow considered threats to the Roman Empire. John was exiled by the Roman emperor Domitian in 95 AD.

All he sees around him is ocean, but on the Lord's Day, Jesus comes to him in all of His glory and gives John an assignment – to write the things which he has seen, the things which are and the things which will shortly come to pass.

John needed encouragement, the people of John' day needed encouragement, they needed a blessing because the persecution was coming fast and furious on them and on the church. And if you're here today and facing troubles and tribulation, the book of Revelation reminds us that we can look up because our redemption draws near. It might be bad now, but this isn't the end. We have hope in Jesus Christ. **Let's Pray**

Turn with me to Revelation 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. 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 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.” (NIV)

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 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.

It's 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.

More than anything else, Revelation is a book of blessing. So, I want you to notice with me four blessings we see right from the beginning of Revelation.

I. The Blessing of the Lord's Victory over Death and Hell

Now John gives us a familiar salutation in verse 4... ***“Grace and Peace to you from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come.”***

This introduction is also used 18 times in the New Testament in letters to churches. Just so you know, in all the salutations, you'll always find grace and peace, in that order. It's never peace and grace because **you can never know God's peace until you know God's grace.**

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.
(That's the Father)

...and from the seven spirits before his throne, (That's the Holy Spirit; the number seven is used over 50 times in Revelation...it's the number of completion...and concerning the Holy Spirit, you might want to write this verse down – Isaiah 11:2 where it talks about seven attributes of the Spirit:

The Spirit of the Lord

the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,

the Spirit of counsel and of might,

the Spirit of the knowledge and the Spirit of the fear of the Lord)

So, there is grace and peace from God the Father, grace and peace from the Holy Spirit and grace and peace, verse 5, **from Jesus Christ**, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Jesus has conquered death, hell, and the grave. He says in verse 17 when He appears to John, **“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.”**

The Lord is victorious. Now why is that so important? Because (and this is critical to remember) Revelation is steeped in Old Testament passages. There are 404 verses in the book of Revelation, and 278 of them come from Old Testament passages. The Lord has authority, He has the keys which symbolize that authority, and He got them from the devil, because He defeated him through the cross and the empty tomb.

If you are a follower of Jesus, you follow a champion, you follow a victor, you follow the conquering King of Kings and Lord of Lords. As we sing that song sometimes, **no guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me.**

Lots of people are afraid of death, but as a Christian we don't have to be afraid of death, because the bible says that death is swallowed up in victory.

Jesus has taken the sting out of death. He conquered death and He conquered hell and here is the blessing of His victory, ***behold I was dead and now I'm alive forever more.***

Do you remember when Jesus was dying on the cross on Friday afternoon at 3 PM? It was the same time that the priest would sacrifice the Passover lamb. Jesus said, "It is finished." He didn't say I am finished, He said it is finished...Three words in English, but one word in the Greek, "**tat-e-lest-i**", finished, accomplished...paid in full. He had paid for the sins of the world.

That's the first blessing; the blessing of His victory over death and hell.

II. There is the Blessing of His Love, His Freedom, and His Honor.

Look at verse 5 and 6 again. ***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***

To Him who loves us - present tense. Often in the bible we read past tense like Galatians 2:20; ***"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."***

That's past tense and it true that the Lord loved us, but its not just a past tense love, it's a present tense love. He loves me today.

John, who wrote the gospel of John, the 3 epistles, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, and this Revelation is now an old man. In this revelation, he names himself four times. Do you know how many times he names himself in the gospel of John – zero. In the epistles of John, zero. He refers to himself as the disciple who Jesus loves. He loves me on my good days and my bad days.

And how do we know that He loves us? He has freed us from our sins. Here is John the disciple who laid his head on Jesus at the last supper, who, with his brother, James, asked to sit at Jesus right and left in His kingdom. By the way, do you know who the first disciple to die was? James. John will be the last. John now sees Jesus in all his glory, and do you know what he does now? He fell at his feet as though dead.

Jesus has released us from the penalty of sin and the power of sin, and yet many Christians live like we are still dominated by sin.

Story: There is a legend about Harry Houdini that I heard, don't know if it is true or not. They say he used to brag, as he went from city to city, that he could get out of any jail. And if you put him in a jail, he could get out in minutes. He performed that stunt repeatedly.

He came to one city, and they put him in their jail, and he pulled out a pick that he carried in his belt. He worked on that lock and couldn't get free...minutes turned into hours, and he couldn't get free. He was so discouraged; he gave up and leaned against the door and it opened. The reason he couldn't unlock it is because it was never locked.

And that is the way a lot of us are with the sins in our lives, we try so hard to break free and the Lord says I've already freed you from your sins. You don't have to believe the lies of the devil that says you can't break free.

There is the blessing of His love, and the blessing of His freedom, and the blessing of His honor. Look at it again, verse 6, **He 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!**

It says in Revelation 20:6 **“Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.”**

We will one day rule and reign with Jesus, what an honor.

There is the blessing of His victory over death and hell. There is the Blessing of His Love, His Freedom, and His Honor.

III. The Blessing of His Soon Return in Power and Glory

Verse 1 says, **“The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.”**

The word, “soon” or “shortly” depending on your translation is the Greek work **tachos**. This word has a double meaning.

It can mean this is about to happen. And you think this was given to John in 95 AD. My soon is a lot different from God's soon.

But this word can also mean rapidly. Meaning that when we see the things mentioned in Revelation, they will happen fast. Remember that 2 Peter mentions **that with the Lord, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as a day**. So how long has it been since the Revelation came to John, God says, just a couple days, but it is coming and when it does, it will come quickly.

The bible talks about the rapture of the church in 1 Corinthians 15... **'In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye**, that is a whole lot faster than a blink. And when we read about the things that are going to happen after God removes the church from this earth, they come rapidly.

Verses 7 and 8; **"Look, he is coming with the clouds, [that is a quote from Daniel 7] 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."**

Jesus quoted from Daniel 7 when He was put on trial by the Jewish leaders. They got so frustrated that the High Priest said, "tell us plainly, are you the Christ?"

And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds." He quoted from Daniel 7, and those guys knew Daniel 7 spoke of Messiah, and they shouted "blasphemy".

He is coming in the clouds. Do you know what happens before the tribulation? The rapture of the church, where Jesus comes for His own in the clouds, in a moment in the twinkling of an eye at the last trump of the church; and then we come back with Him after the tribulation to wage war on the earth. We'll have a message on that in a few weeks.

The first time that Jesus came and presented himself to Israel was on Palm Sunday. That is when He let it be known that He was the Messiah. They laid their palm branches and garments on the road and said blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. The leaders said make them be quiet and

Jesus said if they are silenced that even the rocks would cry out, because it was time for Jesus to present himself to Israel as the Messiah.

He came humbly the first time, but when He comes again it will be in power. We have the Blessing of His Soon Return in Power and Glory, and lastly...

IV. The Blessing of the Book of Revelation in Knowing the Future

Now when Jesus meets John, He says in verse 19 write what you have seen, that's chapter 1, and write the things which you have heard, that's chapter 2 and 3; and write the things that will take place after, that is Revelation, chapter 4 thru 22. Nineteen chapters about the future.

Why do we need to know what's coming? For one thing, there is a blessing in knowing that when all is said and done, Jesus wins.

When you're going through hard times and you don't know how it's going to turn out, you can get discouraged, you can throw in the towel, you can lose hope. But we should never lose hope, why, because God is the God of all hope, and we know how the story ends. The church is NOT defeated, the devil does not win. We win. We are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ.

Illustration: Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote these lines from a Nazi prison, "May God in his mercy lead us through these times; but above all, may he lead us to himself." When God leads us to himself, he often reveals the greatest battles aren't "out there" but in us.

The gospel of John was written so that we might believe in Jesus. The epistles of John were written to give you assurance about your relationship with Jesus. The revelation was written so that you would be ready for His soon return.

In the gospel of John, we see 7 signs that point to Jesus being the Messiah. In Revelation how does Jesus show us about the end times? Through signs and symbols. That's what throws a lot of people off.

Let me give you an example. When John sees Jesus, verse 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.”

Now this is not how we're supposed to see Jesus...He's got this long robe, white hair, his eyes blazing like fire, a sword coming out of His mouth. The word of God is the sword of the spirit.

There are four ways to look at the Revelation.

1. **PRETERIST** view – everything was already fulfilled in the first century.
2. **HISTORICIST** view- this is just being fulfilled throughout history
3. **IDEALIST** view- revelation is just an allegory to show that good triumphs over evil
4. **FUTURIST** view- this is what is coming in the very near future

Revelation reminds us that 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.

Closing: When I was growing up, Revelation was intimidating, confusing, a little terrifying. It seems like there are plenty of people offering to help unlock the “secrets of Revelation.” Usually there are charts, timelines, and ever-changing theories of the Antichrist and the mark of the beast.

The driving questions feels like **“When?”** When will the world end? When is the tribulation? When will the anti-Christ be revealed? When will Jesus return? **But Revelation wasn't written to focus on when.**

Revelation is more about a “Who” and a “How,” then it is about a “What” and “When.” In Revelation, God is really asking:

- **Who are you as a church?**
- **Who am I calling you to be?**
- **Who holds all things together, even when it feels like they're falling**

about? How will we choose to live when the pressure?

Maybe the reason we want Revelation to be a book of mysterious predictions is that: **It's easier to speculate than surrender.** But that's how the book begins: With an invitation to trust Christ when the pressure is on.

Two questions as we close:

Have you been freed from your sins by His blood?

Will you hear and take to heart the prophecy of this book?