



Potomac Hills

Presbyterian Church, PCA



By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

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Revelation 1:1

September 13, 2009
English Standard Version

“Why We Need This Book”

This is the 1st sermon in the series on The Book of Revelation entitled,
“The King’s Triumphant Return.”

Revelation 1:1-3

“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, ² who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. ³ 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.”

Heavenly Father, as we now dare to make our way through Revelation, will You please help us. We know that there’s still a lot that we need to learn from Your Word so that it can have full impact in our lives. We know we’re susceptible to our idols, to our own selfishness and sin, to our fears. So Lord, once again open our eyes and ears to truly hear and understand and apply this Word to our lives. Help us to understand why You have spoken to us in this strange and unique way. We want to be among those who are blessed for having spent time in this wonderful book. Help us to meet You in this book. Help us to see Your Son in its words. Do this for each of us, this morning, in Jesus’ name, and for His glory, Amen.

INTRODUCTION: *What is Reality?* ¹

¹ The Introduction is adapted from the sermon, “*What is Reality?*” by Rev. Coty Pinckney, Desiring God Community Church, Charlotte, NC, 2/13/05 and the sermon “*The Revelation*” by Dr. Robert Rayburn, Faith Presbyterian Church, Tacoma, WA, 8/24/08.

You might think, “That’s a pretty simple question. Reality is what I see ...

Chairs, podium, this stage, the lights, the projector;

My wife, my family, my friends, my church;

And if we leave here to go home, we’ll see ...

Cars, traffic lights, roads;

Houses, doors, carpets, beds;

The refrigerator, the stove, my iPod, the TV;

The sun, the moon, the stars, the planets.

That’s reality. **What I see.**”

The astronomer Carl Sagan summed up that philosophy in words he used at the beginning of his celebrated PBS TV program, *Cosmos*: “The cosmos is all there is, or was, or ever will be.” Is the cosmos reality?

The Bible tells us otherwise. Oh, the world around us is real enough. But listen carefully to some of what the Bible says about this ...

Colossians 3:2, “Set your minds on things that are **above**, not on things that are on earth.”

Hebrews 11:16, “But as it is, they desire a **better** country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city.”

2 Corinthians 4:18, “as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are **unseen**. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are **eternal**.”

This understanding of reality affects our lives profoundly. Let me point out a few ways it helps us to see the rest of life differently. I believe that if we really understand who Jesus is and what He’s doing in the world, then we’ll see every part of life differently. Our possessions aren’t things that we’ve earned or deserve. Nor are they the source of meaning in life, even though we often **act** as if they can provide that for us. But rather, the spiritual reality is that all possessions are gifts from God, to be used for His glory.

How about when we’re facing our various trials and temptations? The spiritual reality is that if Jesus is in control, if He’s exercising His pastoral care over us, then we have no grounds for getting angry about our lot in life. We have no reason to complain about how unfair life is. Instead we’ll see even these trials as controlled by God. He will use them in our lives for His good purposes, transforming us into the likeness of His Son, comforting others through us, and bringing glory to His Name.

The book of Revelation was written to help us remember these truths. These truths are available only through God’s revelation of truth in His Word — in His living Word, Jesus, and in His written Word, the Bible. The Bible is our authority, the source God gives us to see and understand the spiritual **realities** that we otherwise would never see.

Now put all of this together and what do we have?

What we have in Revelation is the disclosure of **an alternate reality** ... and an exhortation to John’s Christian friends to live their lives in keeping with that reality. One scholar suggests that what Revelation is designed to do is to purge our imagination and to give us an alternate vision of the world in which we live. To John’s contemporaries and to us, the world, you see, **appears** to be one thing. In fact, it’s something quite different from what it appears to be, but only **faith** can see that. Only God can show us **what’s really happening** in the world and what life and history mean. The world looks very different from heaven; things take on such a very different meaning when seen from a heavenly, a divine, a transcendent, and an eternal perspective.

In imperceptible ways we all succumb to the temptation to accept what we can **see**, what we **touch**, what we **hear** as **ultimate reality** even when we know it's not. The **visible** trumps the **invisible** every day in our lives. The **tangible** trumps the **intangible**. The **temporal** trumps the **eternal**. How many of us would have to admit that far, far too much of the time we live **as if the Almighty were not working out His purposes** of grace and judgment in the world with a view to bringing its entire history suddenly to a dramatic, catastrophic close?

I mean ... we text, we shop, we eat and drink, we make small talk while multitudes drop dead around us, slip off to hell, while the great prospect of heaven remains so dim to us that we can go for days, weeks without thinking a serious thought about it. **You cannot live the Christian life this way**, says John. You **cannot**, you **must not** allow the **visual** to overwhelm the **invisible**. There's but **one** reality, **one** truth and that is the reality, the truth **as it is in heaven**. John is bringing that reality down to us as he was given to see it and in a form dramatic enough to **arrest** our attention and to **penetrate** our consciences.

Today we begin a new series on the Book of Revelation, a book of the Bible that I've never preached on before apart from a few sermons on the letters to the seven churches of Asia many years ago. I used to wonder whether I'd ever preach through this book, as I was pretty much intimidated by its problems and challenges. The great Reformers such as Calvin and Luther both declined to publish commentaries on this book, and so I wonder if this is a case of ***"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread."*** I'm guessing that by the time I finish this book, you'll have a pretty good idea of whether or not that applies.

When I begin to preach through a book of the Bible, I like to jump right in and get started. But that's not possible with a book like Revelation. There's so much confusion about the way in which this book is to be interpreted that in order to avoid adding to that confusion, we will spend a lot of time on background material before we tackle the first three verses of the book next Sunday.

And so we have to start by understanding that Revelation teaches us through the use of symbols and images, that it's somewhat of a ...

BACKGROUND: A Picture Book²

Revelation is the last book to be written included in the canon of the New Testament. In many ways, it's the most practical book of the entire New Testament since it is specifically written to Christians who live in the age after the apostles. This means that the symbols and visions we find here are meant for us. Therefore, we must make every effort to interpret them correctly and apply them to our present context.

No book of the Bible has captured people's imaginations as has the Book of Revelation. From frightening depictions of the white horse and its rider administering divine wrath upon the nations of the earth, to the image of a multi-headed dragon who persecutes the church, to an evil beast who wages war upon the saints, to the seductress who dwells in the great city of man and who has prostituted herself with the merchants of the world, to John's description of Jesus in His glory, the Book of Revelation stirs us like no other book of the Bible.

Some find these scenes frightening. Some find them confusing. Sadly, some avoid the book altogether. Far too many have seen this book as a springboard to wild speculation. Despite

² Part of the background is adapted from the article *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ,"* by Rev. Charles Biggs, Kectoic Covenant Presbyterian Church, Purcellville, VA; the sermon *"The Time is Near"* by Dr. Kim Riddlebarger, Christ Reformed Church, Anaheim, CA, 2002, www.christreformed.org; *The Theology of The Book of Revelation* by Dr. Richard Bauckham, page 17.

such a dubious reputation, Revelation is a comforting and pastoral book and there is much here for the people of God, especially in a time of uncertainty such as our own.

Indeed, what we're going to discover as we make our way into this wonderful book is that Revelation is much more like one of the letters of the Apostle Paul than it may seem at first. What do you expect to find in one of the letters of the Apostle Paul? You expect to find an account of what God has already done for us in Jesus Christ His Son, what promises of salvation are yet to be fulfilled, and how we who believe in Jesus are to live in the meantime. All of that is found in Revelation as well; in fact those are the great subjects of this book. In fact Revelation is **all theology**, the teaching about God and salvation and living the Christian life.

We misunderstand the book entirely if we take it to be a **secret code**, an esoteric forecast of future events, able to be understood only by those few capable of breaking the code and unlocking its secrets. To be sure, Revelation contains a forecast of great events at the end of time, but in a very general form. That is, it prophesies the Second Coming and the Last Judgment and Heaven and Hell very much as Jesus did and as Paul did and as Peter did. It uses a different form of words, describes the events in a different style, but the message is the same.

Now the primary key to interpreting the symbols in Revelation is the Old Testament. The Book of Revelation is very much like the prophecies of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah, which also make use of similar apocalyptic symbols. Most of those who heard the Book of Revelation when it was read in the churches were probably able to immediately connect the symbols and images John uses to those Old Testament passages from which they're drawn. But since we're 2,000 years removed from the original context, and we're not devout Jews steeped in the Torah and the Prophets, we'll have to do some work to keep such a background in mind.

This means that to interpret this book correctly, then, we'll look to the Old Testament to find the meaning of the symbols used by John. Therefore, as we try and interpret these symbols drawn from the Old Testament, let's not make the mistake of seeing the conflict they depict as a struggle between good and evil as though these were two equal sides fighting for supremacy. No! Satan struggles against the kingdom of God throughout the Book of Revelation as **an already defeated foe**. The final outcome is never in doubt. In fact, since Revelation was written after the first coming of Christ and the inauguration of His kingdom, we must understand that John's vision presupposes that Satan's head was already crushed by Christ at Calvary and that Satan's final defeat is rendered certain by Christ's resurrection from the dead.

But make no mistake about it, the images of conflict which are depicted through the lens of these apocalyptic symbols and images are that of a real conflict in which the people of God will suffer greatly at the hands of the devil. Having been defeated by Christ's cross and empty tomb, Satan is portrayed as a wounded animal, certain to die, but utterly vicious and irrational in his anger before the end finally comes. Satan wages war upon the saints, but he cannot defeat them. When he kills them, they come to life and reign with Christ. Indeed, this is a conflict in which the final outcome is never, never, in doubt. If you take nothing else from this series of sermons, take this with you: in the end **God wins decisively!**

There are four major approaches to interpreting the Book of Revelation. The one with which most of you are familiar is **the futurist view**, which holds that most of what is written here remains yet to be fulfilled in the days immediately before our Lord's return. This explains why people who hold this view (like Tim LaHaye) spend so much of their time and energy trying to tie the symbols in the Book of Revelation to current events. As many of you know, many evangelical churches and ministries devote themselves to explaining every tragedy and political

crisis directly from the pages of Revelation. But if you're expecting me to do the same you'll be disappointed. I'm not going to identify the Antichrist, predict the date of our Lord's return, or explain the roles of America and Israel in biblical prophecy. Instead, I'll be talking about what John talks about — Jesus Christ's certain victory over all of his enemies, hence the title of this series, "*The King's Triumphant Return.*"

Another view — which is gaining acceptance among Reformed Christians — is **preterism**. This view holds that Revelation was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70 and that much of what we find in the Book of Revelation was **fulfilled** when the Romans sacked Jerusalem in A. D. 70, destroying the temple and dispersing the surviving Jews throughout the Mediterranean world. Preterists make the opposite error as do the futurists. Instead of treating this book as though it deals with future events, preterists treat Revelation as though it is largely historical and that almost everything written here has already taken place, with the possible exception of Christ's second coming and the resurrection, a view taken by so-called **partial preterists** like R. C. Sproul and Ken Gentry. This is problematic because it reduces Revelation to a mere historical record, robbing the book of its apocalyptic character and eliminating John's stress upon Christ's final and eschatological victory when He returns in judgment to raise the dead and make all things new on the "*last day.*"

A third view is one which has been widely held by historic Protestants is known as **historicism**. Though very few people still hold it today, this view sees the book of Revelation as a kind of historical map which plots the history of Christ's church from the apostolic age unto the time of the Reformation. Proponents of this view usually identify the Harlot of Babylon in Revelation 18 with the papacy and the Roman church. However, this view doesn't fit very well with the nature of apocalyptic literature, which depicts not **specific events** but **general patterns** of a re-occurring conflict between Christ and Satan which culminates in a final end-times battle.

A fourth view is called **idealism**, a modified form of which I will be presenting throughout this series. This view emphasizes the apocalyptic nature of the book and understands the various visions throughout Revelation as depictions of the struggle which takes place during the entire period of time between the first and the second coming of Jesus Christ. Each vision is describing the same period of time but from a different perspective or vantage point, each vision with a different theological theme or emphasis. As one scholar puts it, each of these visions is like looking at the same scene from a different camera angle. This means that we must not see Revelation as depicting strictly future or strictly past events. Nor does Revelation exhaustively map out the history of the church age. Instead, we must see the visions and symbols in them as **pictures** of **the on-going struggle** between Christ and Satan and his agents, the beast and the dragon, a struggle which Christ will inevitably win on behalf of His people. This is the way apocalyptic literature works.

In other words, the Book of Revelation is to be understood as the unveiling, or revealing **of Jesus Christ**. Not merely Jesus' revelation (the revelation belonging to Jesus), but the book should primarily be understood as the revelation of, or **about** Jesus (God's revelation about Jesus -- to us!). The knowledge and understanding of this may keep us away from unhealthy preoccupations with how history will unfold in the future, as well as fictional speculation on when the return of Christ will be.

I was once told by a wise pastor that an important idea to keep in mind when preaching is this ... "**The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.**"

In our study of **Revelation**, by keeping the main thing, well, **the main thing**, that is the

focus upon God's revelation of **Jesus**, then our primary concern in our understanding of the Book of Revelation will be on **the present work of Jesus right now** for His people and the encouraging hope, grace, and strength that this revelation brings to us today in the midst of our struggles in this world.

With this background material out of the way, let's turn to our text, Revelation 1, verse 1, where we learn about this book's ...

v. 1a: It's Essential Nature³

"The revelation of Jesus Christ..."

John, in fact, tells us at the outset what sort of book he has written. In the opening verse, he tells us that what he was writing was a revelation. In Greek the word "**Revelation**" is apocalypse and it's the first word of the book. That's why you sometimes hear this book referred to as The Apocalypse. The word "**Apocalypse**" appears 18 times in the New Testament, always, when used of a person, with the meaning "to become visible." In **Luke 2:32**, Simeon praised God for the infant Jesus, describing Him as "*a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.*"

There is no "The" in John's Greek so the book begins, "**Revelation of Jesus Christ...**" By revelation he means that in this book God is disclosing to us what we wouldn't otherwise know or be able to discover. These two words "**Revelation**" and "**Apocalypse**" are essential to understanding this book. Many people are confused by the book of Revelation, viewing it as a bizarre mystery. But nothing could be further from the truth. Far from **hiding** the truth, the book of Revelation **reveals** it. This is the last chapter in God's story of redemption. It tells how it all ends.

But the word apocalypse also indicates a particular form of prophetic writing that, so far as we know, originated with some Old Testament prophets and continued to be employed up to the time of John and the book of Revelation. Apocalyptic writing is marked by the report of visions, of the transportation of the writer to heaven in his visions, of the giving of the revelation to the prophet by angelic beings, and by highly symbolic presentations of the truth being revealed. You find instances of this way of writing about the present and the future in Daniel and also in Ezekiel and Zechariah.

What apocalyptic writing intended to provide was a transcendent perspective on the world and upon human life in the world. The writer is taken out of the world to learn the secrets of God's purposes as they are known in heaven and to see the world from the heavenly perspective. This is what was given to Daniel in Babylon. He was given to see how the world looked from heaven and what God was really doing in the world and of course that was a very different perspective than the Babylonians had and even what the Jews in Babylon had, and it's the same way here in Revelation.

In apocalyptic literature the symbols are never intended to be taken literally — a mistake that far too many interpreters of this book have made. Instead, they are to be interpreted through

³ The Exposition of the text is adapted from Rayburn; Riddlebarger; *Unveiled Hope* by Scotty Smith & Michael Card, pages 1-24; Bauckham, pages 1-9; the sermon "*Unveiled Majesty*" by Rev. Steve Zeisler, 6/2/85 and the sermon "*Jesus: The Alpha And Omega*" by Rev. Ron Ritchie, 6/23/96, both of Peninsula Bible Church, Palo Alto, CA.; the sermon "*The Lord of History*" by Dr. Derek Thomas, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Revelation 1-11* by Dr. John MacArthur, pages 13-22; *Discipleship on the Edge: An Expository Journey through The Book of Revelation* by Dr. Darrell Johnson, pages 13-32; *Triumph of the Lamb* by Dr. Dennis Johnson, pages 1-47.

the lens of both the Old Testament and John's own age (the later years of the first century) and historical situation (the increasing persecution of the church in Asia Minor).

But Revelation isn't simply an unveiling. It's an unveiling, a revealing of someone. And that's ...

v. 1b: It's Central Theme

The opening words of this letter contain a general summary of the whole book as well as identifying the nature of what follows, "*The revelation of Jesus Christ...*" This declaration can be taken two ways. Either this book reveals Jesus Christ as the main character, or else Jesus Christ is the source of all that is about to be revealed to John through the angel. In a sense, both of these are true because the revelation itself is **from** Jesus Christ as well as being **about** Jesus Christ. The Book of Revelation is one of **the most Christ-centered** books in the Bible.

As we begin our study in the book of Revelation, our prayer should be, "Lord, let us **see Christ revealed.**" The Book of Revelation clearly identifies itself as an unveiling of the person of Jesus Christ. I pray that as we study it together we will indeed see Jesus more clearly than ever before. After all, it seems pretty clear that John's intention in writing Revelation was that his readers would grow in their commitment to the Lord Jesus.

Dr. W. A. Criswell, the long-time pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, gave the following explanation as to why Christ must yet be revealed in glory. He wrote ... "The first time our Lord came into this world, He came in the veil of our flesh. His deity was covered with His manhood. His Godhead was hidden by His humanity. Just once in a while did His deity shine through, as on the Mount of Transfiguration, or as in His miraculous works. But most of the time the glory, the majesty, the deity, the wonder and the marvel of the Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, **were veiled**. These attributes were covered over in flesh, in our humanity. He was born in a stable. He grew up in poverty. He knew what it was to hunger and thirst. He was buffeted and beaten and bruised. He was crucified and raised up as a felon before the scoffing gaze of the whole earth. The last time that this world saw Jesus was when it saw Him hanging in shame, misery, and anguish upon the cross. He later appeared to a few of His believing disciples, but the last time that this unbelieving world ever saw Jesus was when it saw Him die as a criminal, crucified on a Roman cross. That was part of the plan of God, a part of the immeasurable grace and love of our Lord. "*By His stripes we are healed.*"

But then is that all the world is ever to see of our Savior — dying in shame on a cross? No! It is also part of the plan of God that someday this unbelieving, godless world shall see the Son of God in His full character, in glory, in majesty, in the full-orbed wonder and marvel of His Godhead. Then all men shall look upon Him as He really is. They shall see Him holding in His hands the title-deed to the Universe, holding in His hands the authority of all creation in the universe above us, in the universe around us, and in the universe beneath us; holding this world and its destiny in His pierced and loving hands.

The book of Revelation reveals the majesty and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ in song, poetry, symbolism, and prophecy. In it the heavens are opened and its readers see visions of the risen, glorified Son of God.

Not only does this verse give us the nature and theme of the book, but it presents us with ...

v. 1c: It's Divine Source

"...which God gave Him..."

The source of this book is God Himself. As a reward for His perfect, humble, faithful,

holy service, the Father promised to exalt the Son. The Apostle Paul explains, **Philippians 2:9-11**, “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Christ’s **exaltation**, promised in these verses, is described in detail in the book of Revelation. It thus contains the full disclosure of the glory that will be Christ’s at His return — His ultimate reward from the Father for His faithfulness during His **humiliation**. But God gave Him this revelation to do something with it, to give it to someone else, and so we see ...

v. 1d: It’s Human Audience

“...to show to His servants...”

To further exalt and glorify His Son, the Father has graciously granted to a special group of people the privilege of understanding the truths found in this book. John describes those people as [Christ’s] *servants*. The Greek word for *servants* is *doulos* ... and it literally means "slaves." The *doulos*, however, was a special type of slave — one who served out of love and devotion to his master.

He’s talking about believers. Those members of the seven churches he was writing to and those members of the church today that his words are still written for. This book is written **to show us**.

When we worked our way through the Book of Daniel last spring and studied Israel’s captivity and exile, it was easy to think, “Well, this is interesting, but how does it impact my life?” But when John uses symbols throughout Revelation which are drawn directly from the Book of **Daniel**, he applies them directly to Christ’s church. As members of that church, **we are the people** wandering in exile, just like the people in Exodus who were wandering through the wilderness, sustained by the living bread from heaven, fully dependent upon the living water to quench our thirst, while always living under the constant threat of attack from God’s enemies.

Nevertheless, we have the certain knowledge that God will fulfill all of His covenant promises made to His people. Nothing that Satan can do will ever stay God’s mighty hand. As we will soon see, the symbols and images in Revelation describe a conflict in which God calls us to participate as combatants. This is why we must attempt to understand these symbols correctly, thereby lifting the veil of mystery which continues to shroud this great book.

But what does Jesus want to show us? When it comes to the last book of the Bible, He wants us to understand ...

v. 1e: It’s Timeless Urgency

Notice, too, that this revelation of Jesus Christ concerns “...*the things that must soon take place.*”

This assertion creates a serious problem for futurists since it means that what John is about to reveal will concern the entire church age — these are “*the things that must soon take place*” — not just events located at the end of the age as the prophecy experts often insist. That John is speaking of the entire church age in the Book of Revelation is reinforced by several other important passages in the New Testament. For one thing, in his Pentecost sermon in Acts 2, the Apostle Peter declares that the last days were already at hand just fifty days after Christ’s resurrection because of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The author of Hebrews likewise states that the coming of Christ means that Christians in the first century were already living in the last days. This means that the entire period of time between the first and second coming of Jesus Christ — “*this present evil age,*” as Paul puts it in Galatians 1:4 — are also the “*last days.*”

Therefore, the argument we hear from so many, that “*the last days*” are limited to a period of time immediately before the Second Coming of Jesus, is completely unfounded when we look at the teaching of the whole of the New Testament. In fact, when Jesus Christ took on human flesh, lived a perfect life, died upon a cross, rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven, human history entered its final phase. While the duration of this period of time — “*the last days*” — is never revealed to us, it’s certain that the last days began with the first coming of Jesus Christ and will end at His second coming.

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus warns us not to become preoccupied with the date of His return, but instead to keep watch, eagerly anticipating His coming again. Therefore, what John is about to reveal are things which are soon to take place, things which concern the final age of human history, an age which ends when Jesus Christ returns in great glory, to judge the world, raise the dead and make all things new.

The second thing I would like to suggest by way of application is that John saw this message as urgent. In verse 1 he says the revelation was given of “...*the things that must soon take place.*” And at the end of verse 3 he says, “*the time is near.*” The pace quickens all through this book. Things happen fast ... everything has an urgency about it. For John, the gospel had an urgency about it. It wasn’t something he was going to get around to later. He wasn’t waiting until he retired to get serious about it. He wasn’t putting it off until the end of the summer when other projects were out of the way. He wasn’t waiting until he had more money, until he had bought the house, or made the final payment on the car.

Each one of us is a heartbeat away from all the events of the seven seals, the seven bowls, and the seven trumpets. If we die tonight, we’re still going to be present at the end of the story. It’s that near to us. Every day that passes brings it that much closer. This is critical material, deserving our urgent attention.

Furthermore, we should note ...

v. 1f: It’s Supernatural Messenger

“He made it known by sending His angel...”

The book of Revelation is unique in New Testament literature because it is the only book sent and communicated to its human author by angels. Jesus reaffirmed the truth taught here, declaring in **Revelation 22:16**, “*I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.*”

Therefore, these visions are mediated through an ‘angel.’ Jesus made it known to John through an angel — most likely the same angel mentioned in the closing chapter. John is so struck by the majesty of this angel that he falsely starts to worship it and is immediately rebuked.

Not only were angels involved in transmitting the book of Revelation to John, but they also play a prominent role in the scenes it depicts. We will see that the ministry of angels is very important in Revelation. Angels appear in every chapter of Revelation except 4 and 13. The words *angel* or *angels* are used 71 times in the book of Revelation — more than in any other book in the Bible. In fact, one out of every four uses in Scripture of angels is in the book of Revelation. This book, then, is an important source of information on the ministry of angels.

But the angel doesn’t give the words directly to us, but rather to ...

v. 1g: It’s Apostolic Author

“...to His servant John.”

According to the best Biblical and historical evidence, the Book of Revelation was written by John, the apostle and the author of our gospel and three epistles, during his captivity

on the Island of Patmos sometime in the mid-nineties of the first century.

John traveled the road of faith longer than any of the original followers of Jesus. Because we've all undertaken the same adventure, it's gratifying to realize what the Lord did for him while he was on that journey. John met Jesus as a time when he was a follower of John the Baptist. Following the experience of Jesus in the wilderness, John the Baptist declared to John and Andrew and others, **John 1:29b**, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*"

John and the others began to follow Jesus ... probably more out of curiosity than anything else. Jesus had just spent forty days fasting. He probably looked haggard and emaciated. He didn't have any followers, nor was He a great prophet at that point. John, however, followed Him. In time he became devoted to Him, no longer an interested companion but a disciple of Jesus, convinced that this Man had the words of life. Later John saw Him transfigured on a mountain top. He witnessed His crucifixion, His resurrection and His ascension into glory. The interested follower had become a committed disciple and finally an apostle ... a representative of His Lord. This is the John who left us his gospel, his letters, and this book of Revelation.

Now nearing the end of his life on the island of Patmos, he's allowed to see a vision of Christ that's even more remarkable than anything he experienced with Jesus on earth. He sees him as the "Lord in Heaven taken to heaven itself, a Lamb standing as if slain. He sees him astride a white horse, the magnificent One who will end human history and destroy all wickedness." What had begun with curiosity ended with his recognition that the One he had undertaken to follow was the Lord of lords and King of kings.

CONCLUSION: *It's Intended Result.*

The longer I pastor the more I've come to realize that the people of God, the people of this church, can often be spiritually hungry and hurting ... and that all of us, self included, have a pronounced need for **real, substantive hope**.

I've also come to realize that our generation is, by and large, too ill-informed, too lacking in our knowledge of the Bible, to fully understand the Christian life from God's perspective.

This is where God's gift of hope comes in. Most people view hope in terms of a vague sense of well-being, saying things like "I hope it doesn't rain today." However, the Bible doesn't refer to hope that way. Biblically, hope specifically refers to ***the last days***. And when believers have hope, then the incomparable wonders of what's ahead for God's people are brought to bear upon our most difficult circumstances. That's why the Second Coming of Christ is referred to as ***our blessed hope, Titus 2:13***, "... ***our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.***"

Such confidence frees us to say with the Apostle Paul, **Romans 5:2**, "*Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*"

The Apostle Peter expressed this same hope in **1 Peter 1:3-5**, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*"

I think we'll discover that we'll receive more help in enduring our everyday problems from studying Revelation than from any other book of the Bible. Not only that, but we'll receive

more guidance for how to live the Christian life from this book; and ... we'll receive more guidance on how to be the Church from this book. We'll discover that this is an everyday book for everyday life.

Eugene Peterson, in his commentary about revelation entitled *Reversed Thunder*, wrote, "The intent of revelation is not to inform us about God **but to involve us in God.**" The first thing that will help us become involved in God is to come to a deeper understanding of His glorified Son Jesus Christ.

The unveiling, the revelation from God to Jesus and then to John and the seven churches at the end of the first century, is of equal importance to us who are living out our lives at the beginning of the 21st Century. We need to review our image of Jesus. He's no longer the baby in the manger, the carpenter from Nazareth, or the beaten and wounded prophet in Jerusalem; but now the resurrected, ascended, and fully glorified sovereign Son of God.

He stands as the central figure in the universe, and all men and women who name Him as Lord must bow their hearts and acknowledge Him as the only truth, the only source of eternal life, and the only way. He is the only true Prophet, and the only High Priest who can intercede for us before the Father. He is also the final righteous Judge of all those who reject Him.

And finally, our fully glorified Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is our Chief Shepherd who has the right and power to walk among us and evaluate our lives, so that we can continue to be used as a lampstand to hold Him up as the Light of the world. This process of evaluation will continue until He comes again as the bridegroom to take His church, His bride to Himself in all her glory.

As we hear John's words in the Book of Revelation throughout this series, let us continue to respond to the Savior who is revealed to us, by taking every word to heart. For God promises us a great blessing if we do so. In this book, **The Revelation of Jesus Christ**, we have the sure and certain testimony of that One who gave Himself for us and who conquered sin and death and the grave so that we may live victoriously ... regardless of our circumstances. That same Jesus, whose testimony is given in this vision, will indeed bless all those who hear these words and take them to heart.

So do that. You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

Heavenly Father, thank You for this revelation. Thank you that it does unveil to us our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We pray, Lord, that you will help us to understand these things and more than that, to take seriously what is written, to keep these revelations and let them adjust our lives to what they reveal. We ask that You would do this within each one of us ... in the Name of Your Son, Jesus, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

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Revelation 22:12a, 13, 20-21

“Behold, I am coming soon... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. ... 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.”