

THE PROMISE

Revelation 1

The book of Revelation! One of the scariest books in all of the Bible!? Am I right? Well...yes and no. Scary for some due to the imagery we read and not knowing what it means, scary for some due to the content, and scary for others because of both of those and so they find themselves just avoiding it altogether! So much warning and much unknown that you either love the book or you hate it! It's not the most avoided book of the Bible (that's Lamentations – and we're actually going to spend 5 weeks on that come September) but it's definitely up there! But the truth is, in reality, we should find hope and joy and comfort in this book. It's a book of comfort that our future is held firmly in God's hands BECAUSE of Christ!

Let's read our text today from Revelation 1

First off – what does “Revelation” mean? It's a translation of the Greek “apokalypsis” which means “an unveiling” or a “disclosure”. It's where we get the word “apocalypse” – but that there is, I think, part of the problem. We've taken the word “revelation” and assumed that it means “apocalypse” and to many people, Christians included, “apocalypse” means the end times. It means the complete and final destruction of the world on this massive cosmic and catastrophic scale. But that's not what we believe! We don't believe God is destroying this world – and no where do we actually read that in Scripture either! God is restoring. God is making a New Heaven and New Earth by restoring what currently *is* into what *was* – re-creating the Garden of Eden of this earth. So first and foremost – we need to re-think what “revelation” means. And so the book of Revelation is a book that REVEALS what was prophesied and what must take place. Think of Revelation as the revealing of the promised future given by Christ. It's prophecy – right? And just as we find comfort in reading prophecy's of the Old Testament because we see them fulfilled – we too should find comfort in the book of Revelation and the prophetic voice of hope that it too reveals. Because we know and declare that if God's word has always been truthful and honest and has come to fruition – then we should hold those same thoughts and hopes to the prophetic vision John had.

This first chapter is broken down into 3 sections. We have verses 1-3 that are called the “prologue” (which are John's understanding of the basic facts of the *entire* book), we then have his greeting to the 7 churches in verses 4-8; and then we have John's vision in verses 9-20.

In the “prologue” we have 3 simple verses that speak quickly of the subjects, the purpose, and the warnings of Christ’s message...and that’s extremely important to understand. This is not a book of John. This is not a book of John’s warnings either – this is a book about the revealing’s of Jesus Christ. This is a book that declares what will happen in the future. This is a book that John was told to write...by an angel of the Lord about the testimony of Jesus Christ and the word of God. And what John is told is that **what you are about to read and hear is going to take place soon**...so write this down! Soon? If this is thought to have been written over 2000 years ago – where is that “soon”? Why hasn’t “soon” happened?

I think that’s part of the fear people have – and it’s why so many apocalypse viewers keep saying we’re on the brink of destruction because “soon” MUST be within the next year! What we need to understand is that while he says “soon” that doesn’t really mean “next week” it’s more of an understanding that when it begins...it will go fast! And while this may not be encouraging to those who are longing for Christ to come now – the words ARE still a blessing because it reminds us that God isn’t done – nor has he given up or forgotten his promise to come again.

Remember, this is the testimony of CHRIST – and Christ says he’ll come again, so we must keep that in our hearts and minds and not get hung up on God’s “soon” which means different things to him than to us. These words from John are words of comfort for a people that are longing for Christ to come again – and if he says he will...we know his words and promises hold true. That’s why John writes that “blessed are those who hear” these words and “take them to heart.” Blessings to those who find comfort in its truth, comfort in its prophecy, comfort in its hope. Comfort...in its promise.

That’s what the next 21 chapters of Revelation are all about. The weavings of the promise to the church, what they are going through, what they have done, and what all is being revealed and promised by Christ and his final restoration of them.

And there are 7 churches that this greeting is given to in the province of Asia – 7 churches that are receiving this written account: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea – and all 7 of those churches are of concern for Jesus. And while he will go into details about each church – right now...John is simply building rapport. Here John declares to the churches that God loves them and freed them by his blood. And because of what Christ has done he has given each church, each person, the

power and honor of being a kingdom of priests that serve and glorify God. It's a message John will come back to in **Rev 5:10** and **20:6** – but also words we hear as well from **1 Peter 2:5** and **9**. It's a message that calls them to focus, be encouraged, and be reminded of the work they are doing on this day – in this moment.

John says that by God's grace, by God's peace, by the sacrifice of Christ the one who is the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of all the kings of the earth...the one who loves you and freed you from sins...the one who is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the one true Lord who was and is and is to come, the Almighty...*that guy* – is coming. The one who is above all else...says he's coming! Soon!

What more hope and encouragement do we even need!? John could have stopped his letter right there because there is no other hope that the church needs to be given! That alone should over-flow your cup, energize your hope, recharge your batteries, become your booster shot and all the necessary vitamins and everything else you will ever need! Right here is grace, and hope, and beginning and end, all other words of promises...nothing more could even be said! Right here is a summary of all of scripture! And yet...the vision John hasn't even been given to the churches yet! That was just the greeting!!

The rest, after this prologue and greeting, comes the vision of Christ. But before that...John tethers himself to the receivers of this message. John speaks of his own suffering – because he knows that they...were suffering too.

During the time of this letter there simply was a lot of chaos happening. Rome was unstable and yet pushing for emperor worship – which mean that if you were caught worshiping God then you would be persecuted. If you do not worship the emperor then you pay the consequences. The churches were not following this Roman law of Emperor worship. And so John writes to encourage them to stay the course, stand firm in their faith...even if it costs you your life. Remember that you hold to God and not to Rome. You profess the name of Jesus and not the name of the current Roman leader. Regardless of what you go through, regardless of the casualties the church faces, regardless of what each individual must endure...God is sovereign over all things. Remember...*He* is the ruler of all the kings and leaders of this earth. And because of that, because of what Christ has done, while you painfully endure today...you will overcome and have victory in the end.

The church has suffered a lot...and still does to this day. We don't see a lot of it here in the United States because we have freedom of religion, we have freedom of assembly, we have the ability to stand outside or go downtown and not only share but declare Jesus Christ...but many places don't have the luxury and freedoms that we have. And yet what people are finding...is that in many countries, in many cases, even while persecuted – the church is thriving. Because people respond to hope – people respond to the truth of Jesus Christ. People are encouraged by the Bible and the love and grace of our Triune God.

Paul writes in **2 Cor 4:8-9** that we are pressed on every side by troubles...but we are not crushed. Those troubles may squeeze us tightly but we will not explode or even be driven to despair. We are hunted by people, sought after by evil, and yet God doesn't leave or abandon or forsake us at all – neither before, after, or during those times. The church may be knocked down time and time again...but we rise up because we're not destroyed. Mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually...the Church may be targeted...the physical building may even be destroyed as we keep seeing in some countries...but we are not brought down by those sufferings. Suffering will not destroy the church – because the church is the people, the community – the work she does and the bride of Christ (**Eph 5:25-27**).

Suffering happens – but suffering will not last.

I love the imagery we get in verses 12-20. Images of Christ with this long robe and sash around his chest, hair on his head was white like wool and snow and blazing eyes. Feet like bronze, glowing in a furnace and a voice like the sound of rushing waters. These are the words from the book of **Daniel (7:9-10; 10:6)** as well as **Ezekiel 43:2**. But why is that important? How is that hopeful and helpful to those of us today who read the book of Revelation?

Because if you've read the other 65 books of the Bible...this is what you've waited for. This is the climactic ending that we are given a glimpse of. There are over 500 allusions in the Bible that declare this very moment! Nearly 70% of all the verses in the book of Revelation point *back* and are tethered to the Old Testament! These images of Christ are symbolisms that ties him to before he came. Symbolisms that speak of the hope that has always been and that finds fulfillment in Jesus. That in Christ there is glory and hope, timelessness and holiness. Awe, majesty and peace.

To fear Revelation is to simply misunderstand and not know Christ. To fear this book is to actually do what John does when he sees Christ for the first time and falls at his feet as though dead! And to use this graphic imagery of being “dead” is far from the truth. Those who know and believe, those who turn in fear and love know that in him is not death...but life. And Christ speaks those words to “not fear – for he is the living one who is alive for ever and ever.” – that’s hope. And that touch from Christ upon John was *pure* love. But here’s the thing...and this may or may not be what is happening...but I think John, being the understanding good Jew that he is...takes a page from not only Moses but all other Jewish people and priests. In the presence of holiness, in the presence of God...you simply are not worthy. Moses had to remove his shoes, the priests had to put on specific clothes and make atonements before entering the Holy of Holies and John...does none of that. Drop dead he should! Fall to his face... at the very LEAST – he should be zapped dead on the spot! Sin simply cannot be around pure holiness! It was thought that sin corrupted non sin. My dirty sin could jump to you if I touched you.

But not only is Christ’s holiness actually work the opposite (as we see throughout the Gospels it isn’t their sin that makes him unclean it’s his holiness that transfers *his* holiness to people) but the whole POINT OF... AND WORK OF CHRIST is for this very moment! It’s for this transfer of this holy radiating holiness and presence to his people...for eternity!

Maybe John felt unworthy, maybe John felt this was too much that he didn’t deserve this grace – but it’s one that was given to him...to you and me anyway. I’m not sure how I will respond when I see Christ and enter into his glorious holy presence. Have you ever thought about that? How will you respond when you stand before the Almighty One who was and is and is to come? I honestly don’t know what I’m going to do or say because I know what I’ve done and where I should be and go – and by my actions it’s not there...but Scripture is abundantly clear on what Christ has done and will say – and in *that* there is no fear.

Only grace.

I want to close with reading **Revelation 5:9-10** – it’s the singing of God’s people – the “new song” they sing

- *“You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom of priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”*

You, me...the church...we are able to stand firm, to enter into God's presence and be given victory over sin and death because of Jesus Christ and his work and promise. The one who has freed us from our sins by his blood. The one who was before it all and above all. The one who soothes the suffering, gathers in the lost, the one who holds the keys to living and dying. The one who, by his promise, says you are mine and I have redeemed you.

Let's pray