

Revelation 1:1–3

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- [0 : 0 0] Our scripture reading comes from the book of Revelation, chapter 1, verses 1 through 3. Revelation 1, 1 through 3. Would you stand with me in honor of God's word?
- It can be found on page 1028 in the blue Bibles provided for you. The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.
- He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.
- Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.
- This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, it's a wonderful thing to be able to initiate our spring series and lead us into a new book for our study, the book of Revelation.
- [1 : 2 2] Revelation 1, 2, 1 through 5th, somewhere between the 5th and the 8th chapter. And then we'll have a summer series probably on the songs of Revelation and then work our way back sequentially in the fall through the rest of the book.
- And so today we get underway. And just at the outset, I want you to know that so many treasures of the book come tumbling forth from these initial three verses.
- You're going to see the potency of the book as its theme emerges even in the opening phrase concerning the supremacy of Jesus Christ.
- You're going to see all throughout the coming weeks the practicality of Revelation, even as that closing verse begins to move not only to those who read and who listen, but to those who keep.
- It's going to be an immensely practical book. And it comes with the most extraordinary promises that we might indeed be blessed for having spent time here.
- [2 : 4 7] Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, as we now turn our attention to Your Word, may it so live in our minds that it would grasp the full scope of our hearts and consume the very corners of our life that we might live in praise and in honor and in glory to You, O King, over all things.
- Amen. One would not be too far from the truth to imagine that from the 3rd century BCE all the way right through the 2nd century CE, a special genre of literature suddenly began flying off the bookshelves of shop owners based along the Mediterranean and the Middle East.
- It was an exciting new genre of literature in play. Largely Jewish in origin, apocalyptic, by name.
- The rise of that genre over those centuries arose in part to intermittent persecutions carried out against the Jewish people who in a geopolitical sense found themselves at the mercy of increasingly hostile authorities.
- And so the reading public of those days looked for hope and for change. Hope for better times.

[4 : 26] Change for a better world. And they longed for a future that would indicate a turning of the tables. They dreamed of a distant day when Israel would be exalted to a place of primacy.

A day when ungodly nations would be thrown down and put back into place. And during those days, as apocalyptic became the genre of choice in the local Barnes & Nobles, authors began springing up from every corner ready with manuscripts to meet the demand.

And you could rightly say that this is the kind of literature that if you'd ordered more than one copy, you might have gotten your shipping for free. And so books emerged with titles like *The Assumption of Moses*, *First Enoch*, *The Life of Adam and Eve*, and others like *Baruch*, *Followed Suit*.

And concerning this new firebrand of literature, J.G. Collins called it, quote, A genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient disclosing a transcendent reality.

Now, in addition to these books' portrayal of otherworldly beings careening off the skies, carrying messages to human forms about the reality of another sphere and a coming transcendent world, apocalyptic literature was also marked by the presence of strange visions, of ghostly figures, and a forceful use of dramatized symbolic imagery.

[6 : 28] And finally, this genre of books all foretold of a time in the distant when a Messiah would arise, rule over God's new world, and in His fury, the Anointed One would destroy the present world in a moment, and great cities would almost be, as it were, caught in the horrors of an irreversible calamity.

Such was the genre of another time. Now, keeping that in mind, it is well worth asking at this introductory sermon today, is that what we have here?

Is our book, *Revelation*, which we will be in over the next months, the last among the letters of the New Testament, simply one among many such books that marked the era of that time?

After all, take a look at the text, the opening word. *Rendered Revelation* is literally apocalypsis. The very word choice, *apocalypse*, means revealing, unveiling.

It's a pulling back of the curtain to expose the reader to a heretofore unknown, unseen, strange, transcendent reality.

[7 : 54] And just like the other literature of the period, the book which we commence our study in today, indicates that this revealing was mediated to us by John, but take a look.

It came to him through some careening, otherworldly, angelic messenger. It says, He made it known by the sending of His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all he saw.

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep. So, this very word came from God through an angel to John, and eventually in written form to a reader in a congregation, and to all those who would hear, to you and to me.

Just as apocalyptic literature of that day would do. And in addition, I don't know if you've ever read *Revelation* before. If you haven't, well, you're in for an incredible treat.

It doesn't take the first time reader long to discover that this book is going to be comprised of absolutely incredible, nearly unbelievable, visions.

[9 : 15] Visions which will usher you into odd, if not horrifying, figures. All of whom appear overly dressed up, as it were, in some overly laden, rich imagery that is running along with symbolic force.

And indeed, just like the other volumes in this genre, our book marks the end of an age, a reversal of fortunes, a coming of God's new ruler to the rescue of God's people in which he smashes all of God's enemies and ushers in a new transcendent reality.

And so, as we begin, on this first day, we ask ourselves, is this how we are to approach Revelation? Do we simply enfold it into the broader apocalyptic genre of its own time and in its own popularity?

Now, in giving an initial answer today, we're not going to try to cover it all. I'm going to say, no, not quite. Such an approach would not be entirely accurate.

Indeed, I want to show you in the next minutes, even in the opening three verses, you're going to find the book, not the preacher, the book, arguing for a unique position among the works of its own time.

[10:50] Let's take a look then. The first way our book differs from common apocalyptic relates to the Anointed One, the Messiah, the book's hero who comes to save the day.

I want to say that there's something unique about this apocalyptic genre. The text opens with the words, look at it, the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Now, therein, in its most basic level, we have run into something unique. Jesus, called the Christ, is no ordinary apocalyptic figure.

This isn't some passing figure that appears as the action hero name of some early Mediterranean novelist. This is the man that we have more textual evidence for in all of history, perhaps more than any other who ever lived.

And as a result, I want to let you just know that there is a uniqueness to this book because it concerns Jesus Christ. But let's take a second look.

[12:09] There's a uniqueness in regard to its universal scope. Take a look again at the opening line. The revelation of Jesus Christ.

Now, I want you to know that I take that to mean that whatever is unveiled in these chapters, comprises the rightful domain of Jesus alone.

In other words, I take that to mean the revelation of Jesus Christ, namely, the revelation that belongs to Him. And it depends, of course, on how you take the word of.

It wouldn't be inappropriate grammatically to say that the revelation is simply about Jesus. It's the revelation of Jesus, that is, about Him.

But it would seem odd, wouldn't it? After having four books in the New Testament canon already devoted to all the things about Him, one of them written by John, who many believe wrote this very work, that he would write another book simply about Him, of Him.

[13:19] You could also take the of there to mean not about Him, but from Him. It's the revelation of Jesus. It is from Him. But that would be odd.

As if in his earthly ministry, he was incapable of imparting all the things he wanted to declare. Now, grammatically, it seems to me, more likely, that when you look at the immediate context, the phrase that follows, the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him, there's an indication that it's not merely about Him, or from Him, but it is all the things concerning which God gave Him.

It is the revelation of the things that belong to Him and Him alone, given to Him by God. Now, when you begin to see the opening phrase in that sense, you begin to think that what you're going to read is everything concerning what God gave to Him.

And you see, the entire understanding of the Christian Trinity is already in play. It's concerning all the things that God the Father gave to Him, that is, the Son, and it comes to Him by verse 9 through John being lifted up in the Spirit to ensure that all the world knows the fullness of what has been unveiled in Jesus the Christ.

So what is it that God has given to Him? Take a look at the end of, or the middle of verse 5. And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

[15 : 17] He's given to Him domain over all the rulers, all the kings on earth. So when you and I look at all the forces of power in play, all the contemporary wrangling and money spent over rightful rule, by the fifth verse, the revelation is unveiled.

It has pulled back the curtain. It has let the reader know that to this one, Jesus Christ belongs all rule over every king. And indeed then, that there is a great distance between the kingdom of God and of His Christ and the kingdoms of this world.

Look a little further just as that verse goes on. I don't want to steal next week, but I want you to see it early. To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father.

He has given Him the kings of the earth and He has given to God the Father a kingdom, namely a people for God. A people for God, belong to God through Him, through this Jesus who is being revealed.

Take a look at verse 18 of chapter 1. He alone holds the keys to death and Hades. He says, I have the keys.

[16 : 47] Imagine the keys of death, the final enemy, stand under the domain and they belong to Jesus.

Chapters 2 and 3 will see that He alone to Him has been given the church. the entire church, all the church, belongs to Him.

He is head over it all. Not only in regard to being the source from which it is birthed, but the rightful ruler. That all things done in the church are to be done under His will and His leading.

In chapter 5, as we go on through the book, you'll see that the authority to fully execute God's will on earth rests in His hands alone. That when the vision comes and there is no one with clean hands in all the earth who is worthy to unroll the scrolls, and by that the Scriptures mean to execute the plans of God in the world.

To that Jesus has been given full authority to Him alone to complete all of God's plans for all the world for all time.

[18 : 18] Later in the book, you'll see that He alone, among all men, God has given the right to receive power and wealth and wisdom and glory and blessing from every person, from all creation, and for all time.

to Him alone, to Him alone, to Him alone, all power. All your wealth belongs to Him.

All your wisdom to be given to Him. All that you have is a gift from His gracious kingdom and from His hand.

all glory. All glory. No glory unto you or to me. All glory belongs to the King of Kings.

And we begin already to see how much of our lives are lived in rebellion from what has already been revealed.

[19 : 32] God. Let me put it this way. By the time we'll get to chapter 19, we will understand that to Jesus, God has given all saving power, all judging power over all matters concerning every person who ever lived, complete with an ability to enforce salvation and judgment for all eternity.

and it all comes from Him alone. That is what comprises the revelation of Jesus Christ that God wants the church to know just precisely what it is that He has given to His Son.

God is nearly impossible to put into words. Both the uniqueness of His figure and the universal scope of what He has been given, the uniqueness of His figure, we're speaking of Jesus, the Son of Man, the Alpha and the Omega, the One who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty, the Lamb, the Lion, the Root, the Triumphant Rider on White Horse, the Word of God, to this Jesus, Christ, called King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

God has given this one absolute supremacy over all things, all people, for all time. and it's all summed up in the little phrase, the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him, to show all what must soon take place.

Jesus. Well, not only is He unique, not only does He have universal scope, but if you could get any higher, it rises even still.

[21 : 47] For these opening verses contrast this book with the other apocalyptic literature of John's time that Jesus is not some longed for futuristic Savior who will at some later time set the world aright.

Rather, the text will be clear on this at every point. In Him we find one to whom God has already given an eternal kingdom.

He's unique. There's a universal scope to His rule. rule and that rule is one in which it is already underway. Now, you might look at the text and say, well, it appears to me that it is rolling out things yet for the future.

The end of verse 1, to show the servants the things that must soon take place. Or the end of verse 3, for the time is near. And you might begin to think that it more rightly approximates the apocalyptic literature of John's era, in which they looked for something to happen in the distant future.

But as we will see in this letter, it is so intricately dependent on the Hebrew Scriptures, and in particular, the prophetic word given by Daniel, that these phrases, the things that soon take place, and the time that is near, has already begun in His first coming.

[23 : 20] Let me see if I can explain that last phrase, for the time is near. There is almost an identical Greek parallel in Mark 1.15 where it speaks about the kingdom of God being at hand, and it says that it has already drawn near.

And what it means is that it has come in Him, and yet it has just begun in Him. But it is underway in Him. this is not some futuristic book.

The dependence on Daniel will come in coming weeks, but you need to know that in Daniel 2 there is an incredible relationship between that phrase in verse 1, the things that must soon take place, and what it is that will soon come to pass, comes three times in that vision that God gives to Nebuchadnezzar concerning what will happen.

And that passage ends with a stone careening into the kingdoms of man and a new kingdom arising from it. And when Jesus walked the earth, He alludes to Daniel 2 in Luke 20 in an indication to the Pharisees who rejected His already kingdom in play.

And He alluded to the fact that He was the stumbling block, the stone of Daniel 2. That in His first coming all the things that were soon to take place were in place and in motion.

[24 : 50] And the time that was near is the time that has begun in His ministry. When you and I get our hands around that, you begin to see that when it says the revelation of Jesus Christ, that there is a pulling back of the curtain for you to see what God has already done in Christ, you find Him unique in every respect lifted up with universal domain over all things and that that reign has already begun.

You and I are not waiting for the end. The end is running upon the world long before its consummation. and so when you and I sing as we sang today, we are already in the heavenlies proclaiming what has already begun.

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart, then I shall bow in humble adoration and there proclaim my God, how great thou art.

And the book of Revelation speaks clearly and says to you and to me that Christ has come and that if you believe in Him through faith, He has taken you home already and that joy has entered your heart even now and that as you and I stand or kneel or raise our hands or fall, we do so in the very presence of God.

Lift it up in faith for everything has been pulled back and we are in the throne room here, now, and when we are at table with one another.

[27 : 02] He has been given supreme authority over all things.

That is the book's theme. That is its potency. The supremacy of Jesus Christ. And my prayer is that we will fall in love with Him all over again.

well, how should we respond? I'm telling you how I want to respond. How does the writer want you to respond?

What is the aim of the writer? How should this message be received? Take a look at 1.3, 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.

the book is going to be eminently practical. It requires, it asks, it calls for humble, persevering obedience.

[28 : 19] Blessed is the one who reads. There's some indication by some that there was a reader as this book poured forth and that there was a particular blessing even on the Bible reader in the congregations as this letter would have been read aloud from beginning to end.

Blessed is the one who reads this aloud for the congregation and blessed are those who hear and who keep. That is a very important word. This calls for response.

And in this way it is different and in contrast to the apocalyptic literature of John's time. It I want you to take a look at a couple of things.

We'll slow this down so that you can see it. He's practical not merely hopeful. First, take note that Revelation prefers to group itself with Old Testament prophetic literature rather than the intertestamental genre of apocalyptic literature.

Did you notice the word there in verse 3? Take a look at it. You'll see it there. It's called what? It calls itself this prophecy. That's interesting because it opened up the apocalypses but when it speaks of itself it separates itself from that genre and says this prophecy.

[29 : 44] In other words it has a desire, the manuscript does, to be thought of as prophetic rather than apocalyptic. And that is reaffirmed at the close of the book.

You don't need to turn there now but in 22.6 it says that this book comes from the God of the spirits of the prophets. And in 22.7 Jesus himself is said to proclaim blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.

And as if to dispel all doubt the author himself will give a final warning to everyone at the close of the book that they are not to take away from the words of the book of this prophecy.

prophecy. Now, why is that important? Why this association with the Old Testament prophets in distinction from the intertestamental writers of apocalyptic literature?

The reason is this. The prophets like Amos who we studied earlier and those like him made ethical demands upon their readers all the time.

[30 : 45] their prophetic work was an edifying work, not merely an eschatologically encouraging work.

You see, the characteristic of prophetic writings is their oughtness, their ethics. Apocalyptic writers, on the other hand, were concerned not with oughtness, but otherness.

they were content with a distant future rather than the here and now. So, you see that this letter distances itself from the genre of its own day in that it has a profound commitment to rooting his narrative in the granular day-to-dayness of this life.

This book is rooted in history. I mean, you'll see it next week. It actually calls itself a letter to local congregations.

It was written to actual churches who were filled with real flesh and blood people and a people who lived in towns and villages which were named and known.

[32 : 05] Apocalyptic literature, on the hand, more generally possesses this kind of ahistorical feel. The dust, dirt, the dilemmas of this life aren't as critical.

Their emphasis stays on the life to come. Hope was their goal, not how to live in the here and now. And that little verse 3, it already is tumbling out. This is an eminently potent book for it puts forward the supremacy of Jesus over all things.

It is a profoundly practical book. who would have ever thought you'd read a revelation to learn how to live? But indeed, that is the author's aim.

And he's already made it clear. That word keep, do you see it there? Blessed are those who keep.

That word is used ten times in the book. At various times it means something like blessed are those who heed this. It's not just reading this. Who heed it.

[33 : 15] At other times in the book it will be used as those who obey or those who remember or those who do. And in one context it will be those who declare themselves and remain unstained from the world.

It's the same word that we saw 18 months ago or maybe more now, I can't remember, in the book of Jude where in Jude 4 or 5 thereabouts it speaks of angels who did not keep in their rightful domain under the authority of God's word but they rebelled and it says because they did not keep themselves they are kept under chains for an eternal destruction.

salvation. So indeed we're already seeing that what he wants from us is to put your life, your mind, your heart, your living under the rightful domain of Jesus of Nazareth who through his death and resurrection has been lifted up to have a name above every name and a name that at which every knee shall bow and every tongue will one day confess willingly, voluntarily or elsewhere or otherwise.

You and I are to live under the authority of Jesus. Now perhaps you didn't know that. That's what the revelation has already unveiled. Humble, persevering obedience and we're not going to get into it today but if this letter and I think it will become obvious to you that it is there's no time for me to argue the point.

It is written under intermittent and increasing persecutions upon God's people. The ability to keep yourself in Christ is what it will be about.

[35 : 15] Perseverance. One last word and then we're done. look at the author's promise.

You've seen the book's theme, its potent supremacy of Christ. You've seen the reader's response. This obedient life lived out in practical ways and now we see the author's promise that you and I might gain or have or receive God's blessing.

Isn't that interesting? Verse 3. Blessed is the one who hears, heeds. They receive God's blessedness.

It's God's blessing. They receive God's approval. What a promise. Do you remember how the Bible began? The first book situated so cleanly in the Torah.

God creates all of his created order at the end of the seventh day. He blesses the day and calls it holy. He blessed all the created order.

[36 : 40] And then in chapters 2 and 3 that all got mucked up by those who didn't keep word. word. And then he returns to that man Abraham and says five times, he uses that word blessing.

I'm going to bless you. I'm going to make your name great. And through you I'm going to bless all the families of the earth. So that at the end of Genesis, Jacob, the third son, as you're following this line of blessing, he stows his blessing to his children.

And the Torah moves then to the kingdom literature and the conquest of Canaan and you see God's blessing rise and you're waiting for the seed under which blessing comes to all people and you're wondering if it's David and then perhaps it's Solomon and then you see in their narrative that it isn't until Jesus comes and he says blessed are the poor in spirit.

Blessed. Nine times blessed. Blessed. the characteristics of those who receive his kingdom. And the Bible closes on the very same word that you too might even now at this moment in your life receive God's blessing and as he looks from heaven and he sees you, attach yourself to his son in faith and in obedience and in love.

well, you become his child. What an irony. What a promise, but what an irony. For most of us think of the book of Revelation as some dark, obscure, scary book with a vindictive God who's constantly standing behind the curtain, not unveiling the curtain.

[38 : 34] He's just waiting for you to mess up. He's going to come out from behind the curtain and hit you as hard as he can and he's going to run away for a while and he looks ugly as William Taylor said to us as if he's so gross that he won't reveal himself to us.

No, no, this is not the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible has pulled the curtain back and he's shown you the glory and grace in his son and he says to you by name, I have approval for you.

If you'll find your life under the authority of my king, he's already reigning and he is coming.

Well, to my way of thinking, there is simply not another book among all those written in the apocalyptic genre that compares with this one. We embark today on precisely the kind of book that should be flying off the shelves of booksellers, not only along the Mediterranean but in the wonderful bookstores of Hyde Park as well.

As you read this book, may you come to know God. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, to see the uniqueness of Jesus and the universal nature of the scope of his reign and to know that his reign is already underway.

[40 : 17] Lord, help us to respond as readers who rightly weigh these things and bring unto us this great blessing to be known by you.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.