

The Big Reveal

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[0 : 0 0] Well now, some of you were at the teaching day yesterday on the Revelation, but all of us probably know that we begin a new sermon series today. And it's called On Earth As It Is in Heaven. You can see that visually on the front of your service bulletin.

And I think it's a great, it is a great title for this sermon series on the Revelation. And it captures our imagination. It may even raise some questions. You might think, well I thought that that phrase came from Jesus' instruction on prayer to his disciples in the Gospels.

I didn't know that it was actually in the Revelation. But as much as it may raise some questions, I know that the book of Revelation will also provide answers. Now how we end is as important as how we begin.

And the book of Revelation is at the end of the Bible. The book is about the end of all matters of ultimate significance. And the end has already begun, though, it's important to note, since the climax of Jesus' coming occurred on the cross.

And yet at the same time we are awaiting his return to bring all things to what we call the consummation or the end. Now as we come to this book of what's called the Revelation, it's important to know that that word is called, well it's the apocalypse.

[1 : 2 9] And it's about this disclosure of God to his people, to those who then read his word in the scriptures and specifically in this book. And that disclosure is quite definitive.

It's descriptive. It gives us direction. And there are even some doctrines for us here that are expressed, that are revealed to us in the book of Revelation. We see great Christology here.

Even in these first eight verses we see, though the Father isn't specifically mentioned, clearly the Son and the Spirit too. So there's these Trinitarian theologies that are expressed in the book of Revelation.

There's a number of ways to go about interpreting this book. And some might be quite symbolic. It's important to note there are 360 allusions in the book of Revelation to the Old Testament.

So it's really important to know the Old Testament, be familiar with it when we come to the Revelation. But it's important that we understand those. It's not just some kind of exercise in visualization.

[2 : 3 2] Another approach to interpretation is that it's historical. And so this book is historical in that it's in the past, but also it's presently relevant. And it also provides for us these glimpses of the future too.

This future reality that we long for. Also when we come to this, another way to interpret it might be that there's the victory of Christ or the end of Satan. There's this great battle that's going on here.

It's important to note though that Satan is not Christ's archenemy. He is the enemy, no doubt about that, but not his equal enemy. But it's also important to note if we think about interpreting in terms of this great victory over Christ.

I'm sorry, this victory over Satan by Jesus Christ. That Christ was victorious on the cross. So I think that more important than those interpretations as we come to the Revelation is that the focus is on Christ.

It is through this revelation that we meet Christ. And so John, who is isolated on the island of Patmos when he writes this, and the churches that are suffering and thus tempted, need to, through this revelation, as well as we do, behold the greatness and the glory of Christ.

[3 : 50] I think that's the principal way to interpret this. As we read this, as we come to the Revelation, it's that we behold the glory and the greatness of Jesus Christ.

And so this book is quite fascinating to some. It may be fearful to others. But what's really, really important is that we encounter Christ through this.

That's what I think God wants in this revelation. And so as he reveals himself to us in this book, it's not about us finding him. It's not even about God kind of sharing himself with us, though he will do that, but it's about the Lord revealing himself to us on his terms, not actually ours.

So let's look at these first eight verses then. If you haven't already turned to page 1028, please do so in your Bible. And as we come to that, the very first verse reads, the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants, the things that must soon take place.

And so I think the thing that's important to note about the revelation of Jesus Christ here is two things. The first one is that it's from Christ, and the second is that it's about Christ.

[5 : 03] Revelation is a gift of God from Christ. Christ is the original source. This is the revelation of Christ from God. And he's making sure that we know that it is inspired of the Lord.

He hasn't written it on stone tablets like the law with his finger, but he is the original source in disclosing this message to us. And so this book has great authority.

Now, it's no greater than any other book in the Bible, but John is explicit in the origin of the revelation. John recognized it first, and then later the church affirmed it and included it in the Bible.

But that's the first thing, that the revelation is from Christ. Secondly, it is about Christ. The revelation of the Lord is not only from the Lord, but it is about the Lord. And at the center of the revelation is always Christ.

Some get distracted from this fact. The imagery is so bold and brilliant that even though it's easy to lose track, some fail to follow the lead of the Lord to always fix our eyes upon Jesus Christ.

[6 : 14] Don't take your heart and your mind and your will off of Jesus Christ when listening to the revelation. And so the revelation is probably the most complex, though, while revealing of Jesus Christ.

As we read through each book of the New Testament, one of the things we note, that there are lots of singular kind of expressions of Jesus in those books. But revelation is multidimensional.

It is eternal, and thus the title on earth as it is in heaven. Here we see Jesus hugely, significantly, dynamically, and complexly, that's not a word, is, with complexity revealed to us.

Here in the revelation that we see the Christ, we see Jesus as the resurrected one, the judge, the king, the lamb, the warrior, the thief in the night, the bridegroom.

It's very complex. Christ isn't only the source of the revelation we see here in this. He is the subject of the revelation. And it is what every Christian church needs to know.

[7 : 22] When we, like the original audience of this, we're experiencing suffering, and we're tempted to deviate from the word of the Lord. In verse 4c, we read this, grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, from the seven spirits who are before his throne.

And so here we are, we're brought into the presence of the Lord as it were to his throne, to get glimpses of his glory, and not be tempted to deviate. So that's the first thing. The revelation is of Jesus Christ.

The revelation of Jesus Christ is also to John and the churches. So as we continue on verse 2, we read, who bore witness to the word of God, sorry, John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

Well, we know this, John. He's the author of the gospel and three letters. And the purpose of the gospel of John was to believe. And the purpose of his letters were to know Jesus Christ, to be certain and assured of that.

And we can count on this, John, a close disciple of Jesus, a sinner and a same time a saint. But what is the purpose of John then in writing of the revelation?

[8 : 43] This faithful witness that we read about in verse 2. It is to witness to Jesus Christ. And what is a witness? Now, when you hear that word, don't think the kind of modern day Arians, the Jehovah's Witnesses, who deny the full humanity and deity of Jesus Christ.

But a witness is someone who faithfully reports and relates the truth. And John is faithful in knowledge, ministry, and character.

And the truth doesn't completely rely on John, but completely relies on Christ who reveals himself to John and then to us. And so we too then are brought into this great witness.

As John was an eyewitness, as an apostle, we are not eyewitnesses, but we're earwitnesses to this revelation. And we are filled with the spirit of Christ to relate then these truths that are revealed to us, to others, as witnesses.

Well, angels first came to John to give the message, these angels who are divine messengers. Angels are still at work, ministry and service, but we now have this message in gospel revealed to us as we become witnesses to.

[10 : 01] So, the revelation is actually to John, but it's also to the churches. There are seven churches that are mentioned here from the beginning. They're mentioned later that we'll pick up. They're actual churches.

They're real places. They're not types or ages or stages or periods of the church. We may learn something about ourself actually through these churches and what God reveals to John for them.

The Lord may use it to even convict us then of our sin, but also confirm us of the ways in which we're headed in the right direction. Above all though, I think it says more of the Lord than it actually does of us.

It teaches us that for God so loved the world and he loves the church. He loves his church enough to tell us our sin and what saddens him. And Christ then takes sin we see here seriously.

And he takes the church seriously as well. And we do best when we too take our sin to heart. Well, the key statement, I think, with respect to John and the church's witnesses in verse 4.

[11 : 08] When John records, grace and peace to him who was and is and is to come. We see here with respect to our worship that the church's purpose is to witness to the reality of Christ's presence in the world.

Past, present, future. Past, yes, we know. Present, yeah, we know that Christ is with us. And future, we all believe that one day again he will come.

But the Lord, we need to know, is not delayed in his coming, but already on his way. And his presence is with us. And not as far away as we might think, as our title of this sermon might suggest, on earth, as it is in heaven.

Heaven is really quite close to us, I think. And so this is the revelation. It's actually of Christ. It's to John and to the church. But it's more than that.

As we think about our worship as a church and our witness and what's been revealed to us. What is our witness? Our witness is to the glory and dominion of the Lord.

[12 : 17] So John in verse 6 writes, To him be glory and dominion forever. Right? The revelation isn't only from and to, but it's for something.

And not just something, but someone. In verse 7, John impresses the glory of the Lord on our imagination with the image of a cloud.

I know in BC, when we hear cloud, we think rain, don't we? And darkness and oppression. Not like a day like today. But in the Bible, the cloud is associated with the presence of the Lord.

The presence of the glory of the Lord. And so when we hear cloud, think Moses meeting with Yahweh. See the cloud going before Israel.

And John's witness in ours is for the glory of what he says here is the Alpha and the Omega. And what does that mean? Well, we probably know Alpha and Omega are Greek letters, first and last.

[13 : 18] The Lord isn't letters or numbers, but at the beginning and the end of it all, there is the Lord. He is eternally past, present, and future. There is no one more dynamic and real than the Lord, beyond definition, beyond our personal knowledge, and yet somehow revealed to us.

Which is why the Lord, which is why Christ deserves all dominion and all glory. The revelation of Christ is just for that. Our greatest thoughts are generated by the Lord, and for the Lord.

And whatever enthusiasm a follower of Jesus has for life, is then reserved and released for the glory of the Lord. Now we live in a world that has great enthusiasm.

At times it seems like there is no lack of it. But it's just in some things, or someone in our world that just doesn't merit it. Whatever the matter or the person, it just won't endure in this world.

But ours is for the Lord, who is the Alpha and the Omega, is eternally worthy of all glory and all dominion. So John is giving this revelation of God for the glory of the Lord.

[14 : 39] And it's coming to those who are suffering. Churches who are facing adversity. And yet praising and glory of the Lord, while it may not seem possible under circumstances like that, John is in a prison, other churches are facing persecution, it is just the thing that John is calling and urging those churches to do, and I think us to do in this revelation.

That we praise and glorify the Lord and His dominion over all the world, on earth as it is in heaven. And so that is the work of Christians today, in the church, in our worship, and in our witness of God.

Friends, I know most of us are pretty familiar with the first book of the Bible, Genesis. But now is the time to become equally as familiar with the last book of the Bible, the Revelation.

The author of Ecclesiastes tells us that God has set eternity in the hearts of men and women. And so now when we pray, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, we are asking the Lord to bring the reality of Jesus Christ to bear in our life today.

The one who was and is, and actually is to come, is coming to us. And I pray that revelation will increase grace in our life, and we'll just see that there's much reason for hope, which gives us all the reason for witness, as we encounter Christ through this revelation of Jesus, and what John has brought to us, and the church has affirmed to be in the canon of Scripture.

[16 : 15] I speak to you today in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.