

Revelation 1:1-8

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[0 : 0 0] It's the last book in your Bible, so it shouldn't be too hard to find. We are starting a series in this book. We won't be going through the whole book. We might do that some other time.

This summer we'll be looking at the first few chapters and at least getting, digging into it, starting to look into its message. So let me read Revelation chapter 1, verses 1 to 8, and we're looking at tonight.

Revelation chapter 1, starting verse 1. The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God... ..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. John, to the seven churches...

...do and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come and from the seven spirits who are before his throne and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, firstborn of the dead and the ruler of kings on earth.

[1 : 2 3] ... kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory.

Behold, even though all tribes of the... ..one of him... ..the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come.

Well, ever since the early church, we have had, I think, two opposite reactions to the book of Revelation. On the one hand, some Christians have been fascinated by this book.

And on the other hand, other Christians have kept their distance from it. So back in the second century, early church history, there was this group of Christians called the Montanists who were really into the book of Revelation.

And they had their own really special interpretation of what it meant. They believed that the new Jerusalem was going to come down from heaven in western Turkey in two cities where they set up their sort of headquarters.

[2 : 4 0] And they were known for prophesying, speaking in tongues, having visions and ecstatic experiences, or so they claimed. Now, other Christians at the time didn't like these guys at all.

They sort of looked at them and they're like, we don't want to be like that. And they said, you know, these guys are giving Christianity a bad name because of their weird behavior.

And so many other Christians weren't that excited about the book of Revelation and some people at that time even questioned, should it really be included in the Bible? And the same pattern has sort of continued throughout history.

Back in the 1970s, my wife's aunt and uncle became Christians here in Connecticut and they joined this group called The Move. and they lived on a farm in Massachusetts and they were waiting for Jesus to come again.

And then they decided that they should really go off the grid and so they went to the Alaskan wilderness and went to the middle of nowhere and lived off the land and they survived.

[3 : 51] I mean, it was pretty amazing. Like, they were able to do it. They worked really hard and, but eventually the group that started as sort of an intentional Christian community coming out of the Jesus movement, stuff like that, sort of turned into something a little more like a cult and so thankfully my wife's aunt and uncle left.

And, now many of us look at groups like that and say, you know, we don't want to be like that. Right? Revelation's full of weird imagery and confusing symbols and scary visions and the people who really get into the book seem to become weird and confusing and scary.

And so we sort of keep our distance, right? Now, Christians have basically agreed that Revelation is part of the inspired word of God. You know, yes, there were a couple, there were people who raised questions about it at the beginning, but the church has, I think, rightly understood that the Holy Spirit was inspiring John and it should be included in the Bible.

But I think many of us just don't dig deep into it. Right? You're fascinated or you're sort of hesitant. So I don't know what you are, if you fit into one of those categories or not.

But tonight, we're going to dig into it. Because we believe here at Trinity, we believe that God did inspire John to write this book. And in the Bible it says, all scripture is useful, is inspired by God and useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking, and training in righteousness so that the man or woman of God may be equipped for every good work.

[5 : 30] And we think the revelation is part of that. What God has given us to equip us for every good work that he wants us to accomplish. So, tonight we're looking at the opening verses of the book and I want to ask three basic questions.

First, who is this book for? Second, who is this book from? And third, what's this book about? Each of these questions are addressed in these opening verses.

So first, who is this book for? Verse one, the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.

So this book is for the servants of Jesus. That means everyone who belongs to Jesus and who knows him as Savior and Lord. Now, if you're here tonight, if you're not a Christian, if you're just exploring Christianity, I hope that you'll see more about who this Jesus is.

But you know, if you have a friend who's interested in exploring Christianity, don't tell them to start with this book. Okay? Start with a book like the Gospel of John or the Gospel of Mark which were actually written in order, partly in order to introduce people to Jesus for the first time and actually explain who he was, what he did, and the central message of his life.

[6 : 49] So start there and then when you read the Gospels and then read the Old Testament, then you'll be able to understand this last book of the Bible a bit better. You need some background.

You know, one of the things about Revelation is it has over 300 references to the Old Testament in it. and none of them are actual quotes. So that's what makes it even more challenging.

Okay? You can't just look and say, oh, here's the quotation from the Old Testament. No, it's just woven into the language of the book. But the way that you'll understand what this book means is by understanding what he's referring back to.

Right? Sort of like, well, I can't give a good example. Someone who's, I was trying to think of like a song that quotes another song. Maybe if you know, you can give a good example of that.

But I can't think of a good one right now. Anyway, so, this book is for the servants of Jesus. More specifically, verse 4 says, John was writing to the seven churches that are in Asia.

[7 : 53] Now, that's not what we think of as Asia. It's the Roman province of Asia Minor, which is today Western Turkey. Now, chapter 2 through 3, we have specific messages for each of these seven churches.

We'll be looking at each of those one by one. But at the end, of each of those messages, so if you look down like in chapter 2, verse 7, it says, he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

In other words, there's a book for each church, but we're all supposed to listen to all the messages. In other words, the messages are relevant. Jesus wants all of his servants to listen to all the messages.

And, you know, you might ask, well, why does John write to seven churches in Asia? There are actually more than seven cities in Asia that had churches.

For example, we know the city of Colossae. Paul actually wrote a letter, Colossians, to that church. That's also in that same province. John doesn't mention it in Revelation. Well, I think he writes to seven churches because seven was the number throughout the Bible and especially in Revelation that symbolizes completion.

[9 : 03] And so the seven churches in Asia, they're sort of representing all Christians and all churches everywhere. And so, again, it reinforces that message.

This book is for all the servants of Jesus wherever they are scattered throughout the world. And this book is also for the benefit of Jesus' servants.

It's not primarily intended to be weird and confusing. In fact, the Bible says God is not a God of confusion but of order and peace. Now, it's true that Revelation can be confusing for a whole bunch of reasons.

Partly it's written in a style that we're, for the most part, not familiar with. Partly it has some symbols that we might not always understand at the first read.

But God has given us this book for our good. And he's given us this book not to just make things really mysterious and unclear but actually to show us something important.

[10 : 04] Verse 1 says, this is the revelation of Jesus Christ. And that word means unveiling or unfolding. Right? Opening up.

Disclosing. God gave Jesus this revelation in order to show something to his servants. In order to make it known to us. Keep us in the dark.

Not to hide himself from us. Not to just make us confused and wondering what in the world does it mean. But actually he knows our needs and he's given us this book for our benefit.

And verse 3 specifically reminds us of that. Verse 3 gives a blessing to those who read this book aloud and those who hear it and keep it or hear and obey.

You might wonder why does it say read aloud. Well most Christians in the ancient world didn't own books.

[11 : 01] Books were very expensive. You had to copy them by hand. You had to preserve them in the midst of all kinds of difficult weather and leaky roofs and houses that weren't as stable as those that we have today.

And so most people didn't own books. And so the way that Christians came together the way that Christians read the Bible was they met together and read it aloud to one another. And that's still even today when you can read your Bible on your phone or in your own room or almost anywhere in the world there's still something unique and there's a blessing that God bestows on us when we come together and read his word aloud and hear it and take it to heart.

So this book is for Jesus' servants and for our benefit. second, who is this book from? Well, on a human level it's from John who introduces himself as a servant of Jesus Christ.

Most likely this was the Apostle John, the Gospel of John and the Three Letters of John. Now it's true John doesn't call himself an apostle right here, but he writes as someone who would have been well known to his readers.

And it seems to be this that, you know, this John who would introduce himself without really clarifying who he is would have been already most well known to them because he was that apostle.

[12 : 29] So it's from John, but in the bigger picture it's ultimately from God. And verses four to five elaborate more on this. So look down at those verses.

He says, grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come and from the seven spirits who are before his throne and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of kings on earth.

So there's three clauses here. From, from, from. Right? First, from he who is and who was and who is to come. And again, here's one of these echoes of the Old Testament.

It's not a quotation. But what do you think of the God who is and who was? You might think back to when God revealed himself to Moses.

And how did God reveal himself to Moses? In the burning bush he said, I am who I am. Or it could be translated, I will be what I will be.

[13 : 39] Right? This God who has always existed and who always is. And who is eternal. Glorious. Who's not limited by our space or time.

And the one who is to come. So he emphasizes just as God has come to his people in the past, he will come again. So, from God, who is and who was and who is to come.

Second, from the seven spirits who are before his throne. Now, here's a phrase that you might read and you might say, hmm, what does that mean? Seven spirits who are before God's throne.

You know, you might say, well, is that seven angels who are before God's throne? There are seven angels who come later in Revelation, who blow the trumpets and pour out the bowls of God's judgment and carry out God's judgment on the earth.

You might say, is it that? Or is it something else? So, let me use this as an example, and I want to try to show you how you can figure out what a confusing phrase means, or what a phrase that you read it at first and you say, seven spirits before God's throne, what does that mean?

[14 : 52] Let me show you how to figure that out. And sometimes you'll have a clearer answer than others, but here's a few questions you can ask. Number one, does the book of Revelation explain what this phrase means directly somewhere?

So, look down at verse 12, here's another example. Verse 12, John says, then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me. On turning, I saw seven golden lampstands.

You might wonder, okay, what are the seven golden lampstands? Well, verse 19, sorry, verse 20, gives you the answer. The end of verse 20, the end of the chapter, says, the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

So, there are some symbols in the book of Revelation that the book actually directly explains what they mean. The seven lampstands are the seven churches. So, you say, okay, that's clear.

Now, what about the seven spirits before God's throne? Well, the same phrase appears in two other places in Revelation. Okay, and if you want to find it, if you have a computer, you have a phone, go online, go to Bible Gateway, and type in the phrase.

[16 : 01] It's called a keyword search, and you'll find the places that that same phrase appears elsewhere. So, if you do that with seven spirits, you'll find that it appears in chapter 4, verse 5.

So, look at chapter 4, verse 5. It says, before the throne of God, there were burning seven torches of fire, or other translations say seven blazing lamps, which are the seven spirits of God.

And then look at chapter 5, verse 6, which is the other reference. Now you might say, this just seems to get more confusing.

What are the seven spirits? Are they the seven eyes of God sent out into all the earth, or are they the seven blazing lamps? And what does that mean? Okay, see, so it's not giving us a direct answer, but it's making a connection between three symbols.

Spirits, lamps, eyes. So, the first question is, does the book of Revelation explain what it means? And so we've seen it makes this connection, but we might say, hmm, not totally sure what to make of that.

[17 : 21] Second question, does this phrase appear somewhere in the Old Testament? Now if you type in seven spirits, it doesn't. But if you type in seven eyes, or seven lamps, it does.

So go to Zach 4. Because that is the reference.

It is page 794. A few Bible. So Zachariah chapter 4, verse 2.

So Zachariah chapter 4, it's a vision. Okay, Zachariah's having a vision, just like John is having a vision. And he says, the angel who talked with me, I'll start at chapter 4, verse 1, the angel woke me up like a man who's awakened out of his sleep, and he said to me, what do you see?

I said, I see and behold a lampstand, all of gold, with a bowl on top of it and seven lamps on it. Okay, so we have seven lamps. So he's with seven lamps.

[18 : 30] In other words, seven torches of fire. Then as you go through the chapter, verse 4, he says, well, what are these?

And the angel doesn't answer directly at first. He at first says, don't you know? He says, nope. Verse 6, then he said to me, this is the word of the Lord, not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts.

And he goes on to promise that by the power of the Holy Spirit, God's temple will be rebuilt and God's people will be renewed and God's grace will be poured out.

Now look down at verse 10. And this is where it might start to come together for you. Verse 10, he says, these seven are the eyes of the Lord which range through the whole earth. Aha!

Right? So in Zechariah we have, so right, Revelation, we have seven lamps, seven spirits, seven eyes. In Zechariah we have seven lamps, seven eyes, and by my spirit.

[19 : 37] The spirit of God. The Holy Spirit of God. So that would seem to indicate that the seven spirits could be a reference to the Holy Spirit of God who renews God's people and pours out his grace upon them.

And that also makes sense, if you go back to Revelation, in verse four and five. Because you have grace and peace from God who is and was and will be, and from the seven spirits and from Jesus Christ.

So you have God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, so that would seem to make sense. But then you might say, well, why does he say seven spirits? Right? Why does he make it confusing for us?

Why doesn't he just say from the Holy Spirit? Well, look at verse four. John, to the seven churches that are in Asia.

Right? The seven churches are the servants of Jesus Christ gathered together everywhere. The seven spirits, I think is a reference to the spirit of Jesus powerfully at work among his people everywhere.

[20 : 49] the seven churches represent God's people everywhere. The seven spirits, it's sort of an image of God's Holy Spirit resting upon his people everywhere as they gather together.

Right? And it goes along with the lampstand imagery, right? If the seven lampstands are the seven churches, think of that, think of our church, our group of people who gather together, right?

We're a lampstand. And on top of it is that blazing torch of the Holy Spirit's presence who's among us. So that's what he's saying. And I think that's a little bit of how we can sort of figure out some of these phrases in Revelation that seem a little confusing at first.

And again, it takes a little while, right? Sometimes you've got to dig deep into the Old Testament and put some things together. But it makes sense. that the Holy Spirit is that burning lamp, that shining light who comes among us, who descends upon us, and who empowers us to shine with God's glory as we faithfully witness to Jesus Christ throughout the world.

So that's the spirits. The Holy Spirit upon God's churches. All right, going on.

[22 : 14] Verse 5, from Jesus Christ, Jesus is described as the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings on earth. And all these three titles of Jesus, characteristics of who he is, are going to come back.

We'll see them more as we go through Revelation. So Jesus is the faithful witness. He was faithful to the point of death. And he's the one who strengthens us to faithfully witness to him wherever we go.

Jesus is the firstborn from the dead. He's the one who's the first one who has triumphed over death in his resurrection, and he's the one who promises and guarantees that we who believe in him will be raised with him forever.

And the ruler of the kings on earth, Revelation was written to people who were persecuted under the Roman Empire. And he says to them, Jesus Christ is the ruler of the kings on earth.

He is more powerful and more enduring, and his authority will endure forever more than any human government, more than any human leader, more than any regime that's persecuting you.

[23 : 23] So it's, it's, he's giving a word of comfort, but also a call to be faithfully and unswervingly loyal to Jesus above everything else. All right.

So who's this book for? It's for all the servants of Jesus everywhere. Who's this book from? God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And third, what's this book about? All right.

Now, verse one says, God gave Jesus this revelation to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. Now this is sort of one of the big debates in the book of Revelation is, what are these things that must soon take place?

And what does that mean since John was writing almost 2,000 years ago? I mean, he said it was supposed to be soon. As he, you know, so some people say, some people say, John was talking mostly about events that were just about to happen in his time, in the first century.

In the book, we really have to understand the ancient context and ancient history and the world that John lived in. So that's the main interpretation of Revelation. Most people, I think, take another view and say Revelation is mostly about future events and particularly about the things that are going to happen immediately leading up to the return of Jesus.

[24 : 53] Right? We all agree how it ends, right, with Jesus comes again. Right? But many people say most of Revelation is about those things that are in the generation or so before Jesus returns.

And so people often try to be guessing, and people have always done this throughout history, is try to say, hmm, maybe the beast is this.

Or maybe 666 is, you know, this political leader today. Other people say Revelation is more symbolic. And it sort of reflects patterns that often happen throughout history.

And so it's not meant to be a sort of chronological thing and it's not to be only for one time or another. So you might say, well, what one of those views is the best one? In some sense, I'm going to say there's some truth in all three of them, right?

John was writing to people in the first century. And God inspired him to write a letter that would be encouraging them to stand firm and stand fast despite persecution and hardship.

[25 : 57] And so whatever Revelation means, it has to be something that would have meant something to the people back then and that would have encouraged them and pointed them to be faithful to Jesus.

And so that's the truth in the first view. Truth in the second view is Revelation, it has to be not only for the first century but also for God's people throughout history.

Right? Not only in John's time, not only in the last generation before Jesus returns, but for all God's people throughout history. And of course it will be for the last generation of Christians who see Jesus return in person.

So some of you are like, ah, he's avoiding the question. He's just saying there's some truth in all three views. We'll get into this more. You can ask in the we'll have Q&A; tonight so you can ask more questions.

But again, there's a verse from the Old Testament that sheds a little bit more light on this. So John talks about the things that must soon take place, or if you look at chapter 4 verse 1, he uses a similar phrase.

[27 : 08] I will show you what must take place after this. If you go back to Daniel chapter 2, I'm just going to do this as the last Old Testament reference.

But Daniel is pretty key in a lot of things. Daniel chapter 2, page 739, if you're looking at a few Bible. So basically, King Nebuchadnezzar has a dream about four successive world empires.

His own, the Babylonian, and then the Persians, and then the Greeks, and the Romans. And if you look at verse 44, it says, in the days of those kings, particularly the fourth kingdom, the God will break in pieces all these kingdoms, and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.

And then at the end of verse 45, it says, a great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. So what he's talking about, first of all, he's talking about the coming of Jesus Christ.

Christ came into this world, 2000, at the time of the Roman Empire. And so Daniel was prophesying and looking forward to the coming of Jesus Christ, who established God's kingdom on earth.

[28 : 34] But he also says that that kingdom that Jesus established is going to endure forever, and that it will bring all other kingdoms to an end, and it will stand forever.

forever. And verse 45 uses that phrase, what shall be, God has made known to the king, what shall be after this. And that's the same phrase that John uses in the book of Revelation.

So you might say, well, what's the connection, and why does he make that connection? Why does he use that? Well, he's using that phrase because what he wants to say is, first of all, Daniel's prophecy has come true.

That Jesus Christ is the Messiah, he's come into the world, and by his life and death and resurrection, he's established God's kingdom on earth among his people.

And John's also saying that that kingdom that Jesus established, where he rules and reigns and brings life and healing and salvation to his people, that kingdom is going to remain forever, and it's going to be established in his fullness when he comes again.

[29 : 39] And right now, we're living between that first coming of Jesus, and that second coming of Jesus. And what John is saying is, it's sort of like we're living in sudden death over time.

Okay, I grew up playing ice hockey. The way it goes in the playoffs of ice hockey is you play, and if you're tied, you go into sudden death over time. And sudden death over time could actually go on for a long time, but the minute somebody scores a goal, it's all over.

The game's over. And it could be over at any time. And so whenever you go out there, you play your hardest, because you know that the end could come any time, and the end is near, and you're in sudden death.

And that's basically what John is saying. All right, at the end of verse 1, he says the time is near. In 1 John, John's first epistle, 1 John 2, 18, he says, children, this is the last hour.

He doesn't even say it's the last day or year. He says this is the last hour. And he says, as you've heard that Antichrist is coming, so now many Antichrists have come, therefore we know it's the last hour.

[30 : 58] So he sort of, you know, there's going to be a lot of things that are going to be happen sort of in this, between Jesus' first coming and his second coming, but the end is always near.

And we need to live knowing that that's true. And live giving our full allegiance to Jesus, and trusting that he's in control, and living our lives fully and unreservedly for him.

And that's, you know, that's sort of the main point of Revelation. He's saying, things are in God's hands, and Jesus is going to win, so stand firm, and don't waver.

And don't grab onto something else as your ultimate hope. But stand firm and hold onto Jesus, because he's going to win. And he says he's brought us into his kingdom.

This is verse 5 in Jesus. He's freed us from our sins by his blood. He's that ultimate Passover lamb who's the sacrifice, who's paid the price for us.

[32 : 07] He's made us a kingdom and priests, just like God made Israel in the Old Testament a kingdom and priests, just as God called Adam and Eve to be rulers and priests, rulers over his creation, and priests worshiping before his throne.

Christ has come and through him, we can fulfill that. And verse 7, so again, verse 6 talks about what Christ has done in establishing his kingdom.

Verse 7 talks about that he's going to come again. He'll come with the clouds, every eye will see him, even those who pierce him. All tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. He will reign over the nations, and the response is, even so, amen.

Amen. So what's Revelation about? It's about the time between Jesus' first and second coming. But it's not just about a time, or about events, or about things that are going to happen, it's about the person of Jesus himself.

It's about the person of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And that's what shines through, right, in this introduction, and really throughout the book.

[33 : 21] And so I want to encourage you, you know, if you're someone who's fascinated by Revelation, maybe you're sort of wondering, ooh, what does he think about the rapture?

What does he think about the tribulation? What does he think about the millennium, and the mark of the beast, and 666, and let me remind you, this book is primarily not about the details, but the book is primarily about King Jesus.

And it's meant to lead us to worship at his throne. So we can talk about the details, but don't lose the forest for the trees. It's about King Jesus, and leading us to worship at his throne, and to say praise and glory be to the only God who is and was and who is to come, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever, amen and amen.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this book. Lord, we thank you that for how you've revealed yourself to us in your word, and how this book just wraps up your great revelation throughout the Bible, and how it shows us your glory.

Lord, we pray that you would open our eyes as we study it. Lord, we pray that we would not shy away from it out of fear, or out of past confusion, or even bad experiences, or...

[34 : 56] But Lord, we pray that we would not be fascinated in an unhealthy way with the details, and miss the main point. As our Savior, as our great God.

Lord, we pray that we would also see your work more fully, the work of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the way that you work in harmony, as one God in three persons.

And Lord, we pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[36 : 09] Amen. Amen.