



Listen to Jesus

Revelation 1

1. John
2. Jesus

I know that your Bibles normally open themselves to the book of Romans. But I'm going to ask you this morning to open your Bibles this morning to the book of Revelation, the very last book of the Bible. This morning, we are setting aside the book of Romans until the fall. And this summer, we are going to work our way through the first three chapters of Revelation.

Now, what is unique about this summer series is that I won't be preaching it. We have seven very capable men in the congregation who will be preaching through this passage of Scripture. At Rock Valley Bible Church, we want to raise up gifted men and women in all aspects of ministry. And distributing the preaching load this summer is simply one expression of that desire to see the body ministering to one another. May we clearly see that Rock Valley Bible Church isn't about a single individual, but it's about all of us serving one another and ministering to one another and caring for one another. And giving seven men the opportunity to preach this summer is one way to raise up others in the ministry.

This morning, my intention is to set the stage for the next seven weeks by working through Revelation, chapter 1. Over the next seven weeks, (or so), these seven men will preach through chapters 2 and 3. These chapters contain seven different messages that Jesus gives to seven different churches. Each of these men will preach one of these messages of Jesus to the churches. We are simply calling our series: "The Churches of Revelation: Listen to Jesus."

Perhaps the best place to begin in setting the stage is to read our passage, Revelation chapter 1.

Revelation 1

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.

John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

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. 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, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

So begins the book of Revelation. As you can see in verse 1, it is the revelation of Jesus Christ. That is, the book of revelation "reveals" Jesus.

Now, of any book in the Bible, none is more controversial than the book of Revelation. There is controversy about when it was written. Was it written before the fall of Jerusalem in A. D. 70? Was it written after the fall of Jerusalem?

There is controversy about how it was written. Why did John write these things so mysteriously? Why did he use these images? Was it a sort of code to get past the Romans? How literal are we to take these apocalyptic images?

There is controversy about what it means. What are the seven seals (of chapter 6)? Who are the 144,000 (of chapter 7)? What are the seven trumpets (of chapters 8 and 9)? Who is the beast (of chapter 13)? What are the bowls (of chapter 16)?

There is controversy about how it will be fulfilled. Is it all future? Has some of it been fulfilled? Will it be fulfilled in stages in history? Or will it be fulfilled in a relatively short period of time, like 7 years?

And yet, if we would really embrace the very first verse, much of the controversy would be placed in perspective. Indeed, it is, "The revelation of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:1). That is, the book of Revelation "reveals" Jesus. It shows him for who he is. When Jesus walked the earth the first time, he walked upon it as a sacrificial lamb. But when Jesus comes back, it will be as the Lion of Judah, claiming his kingdom.

That's what the book of Revelation is all about. In the end, Jesus wins. All of his enemies are defeated. All of his friends are brought near to dwell in the New Jerusalem with God, who will dwell with them! (Rev. 21:3).

All of the quibbles about the interpretation of the book are all about when this takes place and how this takes place. The sad reality is that these debatable details often come front and center. And the coming rule and reign of Jesus Christ is left in the background as people debate about when and how these events will unfold.

Furthermore, in my experience, I have often found that those who are most interested in the book of Revelation and prophetic events are those often drawn away into thinking about how the events of the world match up with Revelation. Rather than focusing their hearts upon the reality of the Revelation, they worry about whether or not we are in the end and whether or not we are going to face some of these terrible events!

This often leads to worry rather than comfort. But, if Revelation was written for anything, it was for the comfort of God's people. Jesus is coming. Believing and trusting in him is the path to the New Jerusalem.

Now, I'm not denying at all the importance of seeking the proper understanding of the words in this book. I'm not denying that we should search and inquire as the time of his return. It's important to study and to pray and to seek the Lord's wisdom on these matters. I'm simply raising the banner today that people get so involved in the interpretation of Revelation that they miss the blessing.

Because, there is a blessing to this book. Look at verse 3, ...

Revelation 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, for the time is near.

Did you see the blessing? Did you see how it comes? It comes to those who hear the words of the prophecy of this book and obey the words of the prophecy of the book. That's why my message this morning is entitled, "Listen to Jesus." It will bring blessing into your life. It is the message of chapters 2-3.

And when people get so caught up into the timing of the events of Revelation and how they might be fulfilled in the future, it is easy for them to forget that the entire book is a call for all of us to listen to Jesus and obey his word. Because their focus isn't upon obeying the words of the book, as much as it is on figuring out the puzzle.

My hope this morning for us at Rock Valley Bible Church this summer is that such would not be the case with us. My hope is that we wouldn't be so interested in the timing of the events that we miss the main point: it's all about Jesus coming to rule and reign and how we must submit ourselves to that rule and reign.

Now, the good news is this: in our series in Revelation this summer, we aren't going to face any of the difficult passages dealing with the end times. That all begins after chapter 3. Chapter 1 sets the stage for the entire book. And chapters 2 and 3 deal with regular church life.

In working through chapter 1, I simply have two points.

1. John
2. Jesus

John is the writer of this book. Jesus is the subject of this book.

Look there at verse 4, ...

Revelation 1:4

John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Here we see the author, by name: John. This is the same John who wrote the gospel of John. This is the same John who wrote the three epistles we call 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John. John was one of the 12 disciples. He had a special place in the heart of Jesus. John identifies himself on several occasions as the "disciple Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 19:26).

In verse 4, we see the recipients of this book. The recipients are the seven churches that are in Asia. We will talk about these churches in just a bit. We see a bit of John's circumstances in verse 9. He writes, ...

Revelation 1:9

I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

When John wrote these things, he was on the island of Patmos. Patmos is located about 40 miles from the shores of Asia Minor. It was an island, some ten miles long and six miles wide. It consists mainly of volcanic hills and rocky ground.

Now, when you think of this island, you shouldn't think of some tropical paradise, where John was sipping his lemonade by the beach and spending the evenings enjoying the cool breeze of his bungalow. No, when you think of this island, you should think of Alcatraz, the island prison. Because that's what Patmos was. It was a prison for political prisoners. And John was a political prisoner.

Revelation 1:9

I, ... was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

He wasn't there to preach. Rather, he was there because of the opposition to the gospel that he preached. The Roman empire would use islands, such as Patmos for political banishment for political prisoners.

Such was John's situation. That's why he identified himself as

Revelation 1:9

... your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus,

He was their brother in the faith. He was their partner in suffering.

This gives you a little insight into the circumstances behind those to whom he is writing. They were suffering. John said that he, too, was suffering. And when you place John into history, you can get a sense into the suffering that he felt.

Eusebius, an early church father, wrote that John had been banished to this island in A. D. 95 by the emperor Domitian, .no friend to Christians. Philip Schaff, the great historian, said that Domitian was, "A suspicious and blasphemous tyrant, accustomed to call himself and to be called 'Lord and God.' [He] treated the embracing of Christianity as a crime against the state, and condemned to death many Christians, even his own cousin." [\[1\]](#)

Sometimes, Domitian would confiscate the property of Christians. Sometimes, he would exile them, as he did John. So, John knew what it was to suffer, as did his readers. And John was dealing with it. And he was dealing with it well.

Look again at verse 9, ...

Revelation 1:9

I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, ...

He was patiently enduring the suffering that he was experiencing. He was probably holed up in some cave to protect himself from the hot sun. Yet, as much as John was suffering, he did have some sweet times as well. Verse 10 describes one of those times. He said, ...

Revelation 1:10

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, ...

The Lord's day is probably a reference to Sunday, the day when the early Christians gathered for worship to remember the day when Christ rose from the dead. Despite the suffering of the body, we, who believe in Christ, can worship the Lord in our Spirit. Yet, John's experience here of being "in the Spirit" is probably a reference to the vision that he saw. John refers to this in verses 1 and 2.

Revelation 1:1-2

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.

That gives you an idea of how the book of Revelation came to be. It's not that John sat down one day and decided to write a book on eschatology. No, he was worshiping the Lord on the Lord's day, and he was visited by an angel. And whatever he saw, he wrote down.

Verse 10 describes the encounter with this angel.

Revelation 1:10-11

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

These seven churches are mentioned in chapters 2 and 3. "To the angel of the church in Ephesus, write:" (Revelation 2:1). "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:" (Revelation 2:8). "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:" (Revelation 2:12). "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write:" (Revelation 2:18). "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write:" (Revelation 3:1). "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:" (Revelation 3:7). "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write:" (Revelation 3:14).

These churches are along a travel route in Asia minor, beginning with Ephesus on the shore of the sea, with Smyrna about 40 miles to the north. Then Pergamum, some 65 miles inland to the north. Then Thyatira, southeast, some 45 miles. Then Sardis, Philadelphia, and

Laodicea, all southeast of each other.

These seven churches all received a message. And over the next seven weeks, seven men from our congregation will preach through these messages. Phil Guske is going to preach the message to Ephesus. Will Webber is going to preach the message to Smyrna. Gary Lundberg is going to preach the message to Pergamum. Dallas Turner is going to preach the message to Thyatira. Brian Mulder is going to preach the message to Sardis. Ryan Brown is going to preach the message to Philadelphia. Darryn Wiebe is going to preach the message to Laodicea. I'm looking forward to all of us hearing these messages from these messengers.

In some way, these men will be the "angels" of these churches. Now, when we hear the word, "angel," we often think of some "spiritual/heavenly being." Which might lead us to believe that each of these churches had some sort of "guardian angel." However, these "angels" were to deliver a message to the churches. And I don't believe that these churches had some sort of supernatural visitation from angelic beings.

The best way to understand this word is simply to translate, "angel," with "messenger." That's how "angel" translates. John was writing to messengers, who went out to deliver a message to these churches. These seven men will be our messengers over the next seven weeks that we spend in Revelation.

And really, there is one question that we must ask with each of these churches. "Is that us?" Are we Ephesus? Are we Smyrna? Are we Pergamum or Thyatira? Are we Sardis or Philadelphia or Laodicea? Because, each of these messages will begin with a description of the church, be it good or bad. Then, each church will be told what to do in light of their situation.

There's a phrase that ends every message: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Revelation 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:29, 3:6, 3:13, and 3:22). This is why my message is entitled, "Listen to Jesus." That's why our series this summer is entitled, "Listen to Jesus." Because, that's the call of every message to every church. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Now, I almost entitled my message, "Listen to the Spirit," taken from, "... what the Spirit says to the churches"). But such a phrase conjures up other thoughts in our mind. Like "close your eyes and listen to your inner being. Let your spirit speak to you." But this isn't that sort of message. This is a message that was written down. This is a message that was spoken out loud to a church. There isn't much mystical about these message.

And, we know that these messages came from Jesus. Look at how he identifies himself in verses 17 and 18, ...

Revelation 1:17-18

..., "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

That's describing Jesus. And if you have a red-letter edition of the Bible, you will see that chapters 2 and 3 are all red. That is, they are the words of Jesus. That's why my exhortation is this: Listen to Jesus.

The question is simply this: Will you? Will you listen to him? This doesn't mean, "are you going to put your earbuds in and listen to the Bible on your mp3 player." No, it means, "Are you going to hear and obey?" As we saw in verse 3, obedience brings a blessing.

May we pray for these men as they prepare. Pray for all of us as we hear. May we obey.

Well, John isn't only thing that chapter 1 talks about. Revelation, chapter 1 also talks about Jesus. We move now to our second point. We have considered John. Let's look at ...

2. Jesus

This will lead us nicely into the Lords' Supper. Let's pick it up again in verse 12. Remember, John had just hear this loud voice (like a trumpet) saying ...

Revelation 1:11

saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

And naturally, when you hear such a voice, you want to see who is speaking. And John saw Jesus. This isn't your ordinary Jesus. This is the apocalyptic Jesus.

Revelation 1:12-16

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

John's response was only natural.

Revelation 1:17-20

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. Write therefore

the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

So, picture the scene. Jesus was standing in the midst of the lampstands. He has a long robe. He is wearing a golden sash. His hair is white. His eyes are flaming red. His feet are bronze. His voice was loud. He held seven stars in his hand. A sharp sword came out of his mouth. His face was like the sun.

He said, "I'm the first and the last." He said, "He has the keys of Death and Hades." In other words, he has conquered death. Now, what's interesting is this description of Jesus is mentioned again in chapters 2 and 3.

"The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands" (Revelation 1:12-13, mentioned again in Revelation 2:1). "The words of the first and the last who dies and has come to life" (Revelation 1:18, mentioned again in Revelation 2:8). "... the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword" (Revelation 1:16, mentioned again in Revelation 2:12). "The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze" (Revelation 1:14-15, mentioned again in Revelation 2:18). "The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars" (Revelation 1:20, mentioned again in Revelation 3:1). "The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens" (Revelation 1:18, mentioned again in Revelation 3:7). "The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation." (Revelation 1:5, mentioned again in Revelation 3:17).

This brings weight and authority to the message. It is an overwhelming picture of Jesus. And it is no wonder that John says that Jesus is worthy of being obeyed and trusted.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 4, 2017 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] History of the Christians Church, volume 2, p. 44)