

April 16, 2023 by Steve Brandon



The Beginning of the Revelation

Revelation 1:1-3

- 1. The Revelation is from God (verse 1).**
- 2. The Revelation is about Jesus (verse 2).**
- 3. The Revelation is for You (verse 3).**

I invite you to open in your Bibles to the book of Revelation. We are beginning this morning an exposition of this great book of the Bible. It is the last book of the Bible. It deals with the end of the world and everything leading up to the end of the world. It's a fitting way to end the Bible.

The Bible begins in Genesis 1 with the creation of a perfect garden, Adam and Eve in perfect fellowship with God. But, because of their sin, the world has been ruined. And because of our sin, we have contributed to its ruin. The book of Revelation tells the story of how it will all be fixed and put back together. The sin that ruined the world is judged. Any rebellion against the Lord is conquered. So that, by the end of the book, we have God's people dwelling with God in a perfect city, the New Jerusalem. To get to the New Jerusalem, there is much that will take place first. The book of Revelation tells that story. I'm excited to tell that story to all of you, as we see Jesus Christ, finally establishing his kingdom in all of its fullness.

The big application of the book of Revelation comes from the very end. In the last chapter and the penultimate verse of that chapter. We read, "Come, Lord Jesus." This is the prayer that John prays at the end of the book, "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20). It is the prayer that I hope all of you pray by the time that we are finished with the book of Revelation. As you hear and think of the events that will take place when Jesus comes and establishes his kingdom, that you will long for his return to come! that you will pray, "Come, Lord Jesus." It's my prayer that by the end of our exposition of Revelation, that the end of the world won't scare you, but that you will long for it! that you will pray, "Come, Lord Jesus."

Such a prayer is an expression of your loving and longing for the appearing of Jesus. When Paul was in his final days, he wrote, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:6-8). On that final day, the crown of righteousness will come to those who have "loved his appearing." My hope and desire for Rock Valley Bible Church is that our working through Revelation would create within you a love for his appearing, that you would pray, "Come, Lord Jesus."

So, let's begin by reading the first three verses.

Revelation 1:1-3

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.

From verse 1, I get my first point:

1. The Revelation is from God (verse 1).

You can see it right there in verse 1, "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him." This book is the Revelation that is from God. God gave this revelation to Jesus. And if you track the path of this revelation, you see that it takes a bit of a journey. God gave the revelation to Jesus (verse 1). Jesus used an angel to send it to John. John is writing it for his servants.

In this Revelation, God shows to his servants the things that must soon take place. From the very first verse, the subject matter of the Revelation is set. It's about future things. It's about the things that will take place "soon." Now, this is one of the most difficult phrases to understand in all of Revelation. How can the events in Revelation be described as "soon," when written some 2,000 years ago, when it seems as if very little of Revelation has actually taken place.

Now, to be sure, there is much in Revelation that we haven't taken place. The kingdom of this world has not yet become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ! (Rev. 11:15). But too often in our minds, we set forth Revelation in our context, in 21st century America, as if very little of Revelation has taken place, but we are awaiting all of these future events to unfold. Yet, such an interpretation would stretch this word, "soon," especially as it was written for those in the first century. There may be some things that haven't come to full fruition, but are very much in effect today. God's judgment beginning to come upon those who don't believe. Spiritual warfare against Satan is taking place at this moment. Such things are taking place, and may be a beginning fulfillment of the book of Revelation.

Yet, "soon" in God's mind is different than "soon" in ours (2 Peter 3:8). and we wait for the ultimate fulfillment of these things. We will talk

more about this word, "soon" throughout our exposition of the book.

But my point is this: the Revelation all originates with God, the Father. As I have said, "The Revelation is from God."

Now, the key to the book is found in this word, "Revelation." Note, that this word is singular. I know that many people like to call this book, "Revelations." But it's not. It's "Revelation." This entire book is the "Revelation of Jesus Christ." Now, the Greek word that is translated, "Revelation" is the word, "Apocalypse," which literally means "uncovering" or "unveiling." That is, taking away what is hidden. It's the rolling away of the curtain at the beginning of a play to reveal the set. It's the unwrapping of the present on Christmas Day to reveal the gift. It's the end of the story, where we find out who did it and it all makes sense. The revealing is to make what is hidden become clear.

Unfortunately, this isn't how most people see the book of Revelation. Rather they see the book as a covered and clouded with mystery, not able to be understood, except by the experts. I can see why this is the case. The book of Revelation is filled with strange things.

- swords that come out of mouths (Revelation 1:16)
- creatures that have 6 wings and are full of eyes all around them (Revelation 4:8)
- lions that look like lambs (Revelation 5:8)
- eagles that cry out with loud voices (Revelation 8:13)
- locusts with human faces and tails that sting like scorpions (Revelation 9:7-10)
- pits that have no bottom (Revelation 9:1-2, 11; 20:1)
- scrolls that are eaten (Revelation 10:8-9)
- dragons that fight with angels (Revelation 12:7)
- a woman who has wings like eagles (Revelation 12:14)
- serpents who pour out water like rivers from their mouths (Revelation 12:15)
- a beast with 10 horns and 7 heads, (Revelation 13:1; 17:3, 7, 9)
- bowls that pour out the wrath of God (Revelation 16:1)
- a horse that comes riding down from heaven (Revelation 19:11)
- a lake that burns with fire (Revelation 20:10)
- a city that is shaped like a cube a thousand miles on all sides (Revelation 21:16).

Certainly, these images are difficult to understand, I'm not denying that. I would be the first to tell you that I don't understand many of these things. But that doesn't mean that we are not able to understand the book. Certainly, there will be some things forever clouded in our minds. But there is enough for all of us to understand.

Consider again what verse 1 says, "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place." The Revelation that God has revealed here is "to his servants." Note, that John didn't say, God has revealed these things to his prophesy experts, to those who are up on current political happenings in the Middle East. to his Ph. D. students in New Testament theology. No, God has revealed these things "to his servants," to those who serve him. That is, to those who trust in him, and walk in his ways. That is, to all of us in this room, who believe in the Lord Jesus!

And this is good news. This book is meant to be understood by us! Admittedly, the book is difficult. Now, it's not difficult because it so hard to understand. It's difficult because it's so different. The main reason why we don't understand the book, is because we don't understand the literary genre.

We understand Old Testament law, which is filled with commands of how life should be and consequences for failing to so live. We understand poetry and its use of similes and metaphors to describe real life. We understand narratives, which are stories of events that took place in history. We understand the epistles, which are letters written to churches, given to give direction to them. But Revelation isn't written in any of these ways. Much of it is written in a genre called, apocalyptic. This style of writing uses pictures and images, to create an image in our mind.

In many ways, I think that the book of Revelation is like our political cartoons today. For instance, let me show you a political cartoon. In this cartoon, we have a Donkey and an Elephant playing tug of war with a ribbon. When we see this, we know who the Donkeys are and who the Elephants are. the Donkeys are Democrats and Elephants are Republicans. With some labels in the picture you find out that they are battling during elections for seats in the government and the agenda going forward.

This is how Revelation works. There are candlesticks and horses and locusts and dragons and beasts. Each of these object or creatures are pictures that stand for something else. just like our political cartoons. There is another meaning behind the image.

Sometimes, the animals in Revelation are quite strange, and unrealistic. Consider this picture. What a strange animal this is. It looks like a donkey with two heads on opposite sides of its body. We know that such an animal doesn't really exist. (If you are familiar with the story of Dr. Doolittle, it looks like a "Pushmi-Pullyu.") Yet, knowing that it's a political cartoon, we have a bit of an idea of what it means. It means that the Democrats are divided. Putting in a few labels helps to make it clear. The progressives are pulling the party one way. The moderates are pulling it another way.

Consider another picture. We see a big puffer fish about to swallow a guppy. What does this mean? Upon closer examination, we see that the guppy has a human face. That's an animal that doesn't really exist. The human face is the picture of our president, Joe Biden. So, it means that something is swallowing the president. Lots of things could fit. But with a label, the intention of the cartoon is clear. The label on the puffer fish says, "Inflation." The cartoon simply means that the inflation in our country is hurting the presidency. But the puffer fish could have been any number of things: The continue economic demands of the war in Ukraine. The controversies with his son that seemingly never go away. The crisis at the border, that's not resolved. We would have understood that every one of these things as true. But with the labels, the meaning of the cartoon is clear what is trying to be communicated.

Here's another political cartoon. We see a bear, fishing for salmon. But, rather than eating the salmon, the salmon is actually chomping on

the bear. It's strange. This doesn't ever happen in real life. Normally, the bear eats the salmon for lunch. What could it mean? Just like donkeys and elephants represent Democrats and Republicans, bears often depict another nation, Russia. With some labels, the cartoon becomes clear. The bear is labeled as Russia and the fish is labeled as Ukraine. The cartoon is depicting the unexpected result of Russia being stymied by Ukraine.

Finally, one more. Here's another bear, he is very thirsty, longing for a drop from the faucet. The bear doesn't represent Russia. It represents California. It represents the drought in California. Yet, with all of the water now, there is another problem. The bear is swimming in water. Yet, he says, "Remember, we still have a drought. Don't water your lawn."

Now, I belabor this point about the political cartoons. because I think that they help to give us an insight into the meaning of Revelation. Because, apocalyptic literature works much like political cartoons. John sees the image, he sees the strange creature, or the woman with wings, or the lake that's on fire. but the image is only a picture in a symbolic way of other events.

The difficulty in interpretation is to understand what the symbols represent. But again, I remind you, that it's not written to prophecy experts in the 21st century. The book of Revelation is written from God to his servants. It was written to his servants in the first century. And I believe that it was written in a way that they could understand.

Just think about these political cartoons. We know what donkeys and elephants and bears represent. It's not too difficult for us to understand these cartoons. But can you imagine someone 2,000 years from now trying to understand these cartoons? it would be very difficult! I think that it is similar with the book of Revelation. I believe that the images would have been clear to the first century readers.

So, when it comes to interpreting these symbols, we need to keep the first century readers in mind. Revelation was written by God to those in the first century. Their understanding of Revelation wasn't dependent upon events that would transpire in the 21st century. No, they have everything available to them to understand the Revelation that God gave to them.

Here's the good news, what makes these images understandable, is that much of the imagery comes straight from the Old Testament. What is interesting about the book of Revelation is that it doesn't contain a single Old Testament quote. Yet, it has more allusions to the books of the Old Testament than any other book in the Bible.

So, do you want to understand the book of Revelation? Be a regular reader of the Bible, and you will see the images of the Old Testament come creeping into the book of Revelation. You don't come to know the meaning of Revelation by reading the newspaper and seek to discern current events. You understand the meaning of Revelation by reading the Old Testament, and hearing how it deals with the imagery. Then, the imagery of Revelation will begin to become second-nature.

In teaching through Revelation, D. A. Carson made the comment of how important it is to read the Bible to understand Revelation. He said something to this effect, "To truly understand book of Revelation, we need to read the Bible, read the Bible, read the Bible, read the Bible." Because, much of the imagery of the book of Revelation comes straight from the Old Testament. Now, that's not to say that it is easy. There is much in Revelation that is clouded in mystery.

Let's move on. My second point comes from verse 2.

2. The Revelation is about Jesus (verse 2).

Revelation 1:1a-2

He [God] 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.

The "who" in this verse is referring to John. In writing the Revelation, John bore witness "to the word of God." That is, John bore witness to everything that he heard from the Lord. John also bore witness "to the testimony of Jesus Christ." That is, John's witness in the book of Revelation is about Jesus.

I just need to say here that many people miss this. Many are so interested in time-lines, and current events, and how times today look like the end is near, that they can easily forget the main subject of the book of Revelation.

The main subject of the book is Jesus! Jesus makes an appearance in almost every chapter of Revelation.

We will see him described in chapter 1 as clothed with a long robe, with eyes like a flame of fire, with a voice like the roar of many waters, with a face that shines like the sun in full strength! In chapters 2 and 3, we hear straight from Jesus, as he, himself speaks to the churches. In chapter 5, Jesus is worshiped right alongside of God the Father, being identified as the Passover Lamb that was slain for our sins and purchased our redemption. as co-equal and co-worthy of worship, Revelation 5:13 "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" In chapter 6, we see the final wrath of Jesus bringing terror to people. In chapter 7, we see the multitude coming out of the great tribulation worshipping Jesus, who receives the praise, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!" (7:10). In chapter 8, we see Jesus, opening the final seal, bringing in the judgment of the trumpets (8:1). In chapter 11, we see Jesus receiving his kingdom! "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever!" (11:15). In chapter 12, the great drama of redemption is told, of the birth of Jesus Revelation 12:5, "who is to rule all the nations with a rode of iron." In chapter 13, we get sight of the book of the Lamb who was slain (13:8). Those who names were in the book were the ones who refuse to worship the beast. In chapter 14, we see Jesus, the Lamb, as the one protecting the 144,000 from death. In chapter 15, a song is sung. It's called, "The song of the Lamb." In chapter 17, we see the 10 horns making war with Jesus, with Jesus coming out the victor, "The Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lord and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful" (17:14). In chapter 19, we see the marriage supper of the Lamb, where the church is united to together forever. In chapter 19, we also see Jesus come riding in on a white horse, coming to rule the nations with a rode of iron. In chapter 20, we see Christ reigning with his saints in his kingdom! In chapter 21, we see Jesus in the center of the city, as the temple and light of the city (Revelation 21:22-23). In

chapter 22, we see the promise of Jesus, that he is coming soon.

Revelation is all about Jesus! It is all about how he is coming to rule and to reign upon the earth!

Jesus came the first time, as the Lamb of God, to redeem his people (Revelation 5:9). Jesus will come a second time, as the Lion of Judah, to bring his judgment upon all who have refused to trust him and to follow after him! (Revelation 5). Jesus will be forever remembered for his willing sacrifice upon the cross. Picture the scene in heaven with me, with the heavenly beings worshiping Jesus, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:9-10).

We simply need a healthy warning this morning, that in studying the book of Revelation, we cannot get more interested in timelines and current events, than we can in Jesus. Because the book is all about Jesus! Let's not miss the Lamb, because of our preoccupation with how it all ends! In other words, let us come to the end of the book, praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Finally, let's look at my last point.

3. The Revelation is for You (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.

This brings a blessing to me, as I read the words to you. More importantly, it brings a blessing to you, as you hear the words of Revelation. But most importantly, it brings a blessing to you when you submit yourself to the message of the Revelation. "Blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it" (verse 3). The blessing doesn't come merely in the hearing, but in the obedience that follows the hearing.

The question comes, "what is written for us to obey in this book?" Well, throughout this book, there are two sides presented, those who worship the Lamb, and those who worship Satan. Apocalyptic literature tends to be black and white. You are on one side or the other. There is no gray in apocalyptic literature. In our lives, we see much gray. We all know those who are on the fence. It's not quite so clear whether they are a follower of Christ or not. They say so with their lips. But their actions give us a bit of doubt. Not so in apocalyptic literature. Not so in the book of Revelation.

My hope is that preaching through Revelation would give each of us at Rock Valley Bible Church firm conviction that we all are on the side of the Lamb, without a doubt. Not only do we love hearing the prophesy of this book, but we love obeying the words of what is written. This is where the blessing comes. If you are not keeping the things written in this book, the blessing of verse 3 is not a blessing to you.

One of the great themes of Revelation is the idea of overcoming. In Revelation 2-3, Jesus will send messages to seven churches. In each of these churches, he promises a blessing to those who "conquer." That is, to those who overcome and stay faithful until the end.^[1]

Let's look at a few of these statements. Speaking to those in Ephesus, Jesus says, "To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7). "The one who conquers" is the one who follows in the way that God has set forth. The main concern that Jesus had with the church in Ephesus was that they had lost their first love, who regains the first love and walks with God.

Let's look at another example. To the church in Smyrna, Jesus called them to be faithful unto death. It is when they did so that Jesus would give them the crown of life (Revelation 2:10). To them he says, "the one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death" (Revelation 2:11), which is called the lake of fire in Revelation 20:14-15; 21:8. This is the sort of dichotomy that is put forth in Revelation. It's not a mere profession of Jesus that brings the blessing. It is a matter of being faithful even to the end of your life, even if it means death, not denying Jesus, not loving your life. Those who compromise or are cowardly will taste the second death. This begs the question, "Whose side will you be on?"

The book of Revelation will present this clear divide. We must be on the side of the Lamb to receive this blessing. We could look at the other five statements and hear a similar message (see Revelation 2:17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). This blessing will come to the one who isn't duped by the false teaching, to the one who isn't lukewarm, to the one who continues in faithfulness of following after Christ.

The blessed ones will follow Jesus until the end, perhaps even the end of their lives. Consider this description of those who overcome: "And they have conquered him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death" (Revelation 12:11). In coming weeks, we will see that the book of Revelation is written to a persecuted people. It wasn't written to a people at ease. Rather, to those who needed to hear the message, "Stay strong! You must overcome! And you will be with me forever!" The opposite was likewise true, "If you don't overcome, you won't be with me. If you love your life, you won't enjoy the blessing of God!"

How do you conquer? It is through the blood of Christ. That's why Christ needs to be central in the understanding of Revelation (see my second point). It is those "who follow the Lamb wherever he goes" who know the blessing (Revelation 14:4). Do you "follow the Lamb wherever he goes?" It is those who will know the blessing of this book upon their lives. It's these who "have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless" (Revelation 14:4-5). "

"Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus" (Revelation 14:12). This is talking about the perseverance of the saints! That is where the blessing comes. It comes to those who persevere in their obedience and submission to Christ throughout their whole lives.

The book of Revelation contains seven statements of "Blessing" upon faithful followers of Christ. The first was in Revelation 1:3. Here is the second statement of blessing: "And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'

'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!' (Revelation 14:13). These people have endured and kept their faith firm until the end. And they are with Christ.^[2]

This theme of "blessing" is huge in the book of Revelation. One of the most helpful resources that I have found in working through Revelation is the commentary by Nancy Guthrie. The commentary is entitled, "Blessed: Experiencing the Promise of the Book of Revelation."^[3] She picks up on these seven statements of blessing and lets the theme ride through her commentary.

"Blessing" is how the book begins. It's how the book ends. Consider the final two statements of blessing in Revelation 22. This chapter begins with an image of the river of life and the tree of life. We read the following:

Revelation 22:7

"And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

This is almost verbatim of how John begins this book in chapter 1:3, "Blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it." John begins with a blessing if you obey everything in this book. And he ends with the blessing to those who keep the words of the prophesy of this book. Often, what you begin with and end with is the key thing in your message. Revelation is for you. It is for your blessing, if you but follow the Lamb.

As we see the judgments being poured out upon those who have been rebellious, rejectors of God, we will see the blessing, that we will escape the judgment. We escape, not because of our obedience, but because our obedience reflects the love of Christ, and your longing for him and trust in his sacrifice.

Consider the final blessing:

Revelation 22:14

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

We know from Revelation 7:14 that their robes will be washed white in the blood of the Lamb, again, symbolic of trusting in the bloody sacrifice of Christ. Their robes are washed and cleansed, so that they have access to the tree of life. The message is clear: if you wash yourself in the blood of Christ, you can have access to the tree of life. That very tree that Adam and Eve had access to in the garden of Eden. They forfeited access because of their sin. But we can have access to it through faith in Jesus.

Note that verse 14 describes those in the city. In verse 15, we see those outside the city being described. "Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood." This gives a picture of what it means to disobey the Lord. Such people will not know the blessing of the book of Revelation (verse 14).

So, the big question comes for us this morning: "Are you blessed?" Are you on the side of the Lamb? This is the message of Revelation: Christ has purchased our redemption; he will win; he will bring his saints to be with him; but those outside will be judged for their rebellion. Such is the message that you will hear me say over and over for the next year, as this is the singular message of Revelation.

"Come, Lord Jesus!"

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 16, 2023 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] See Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21.

[2] Here are the seven statements of blessing:

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.

Revelation 14:13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

Revelation 16:15 ("Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!")

Revelation 19:9 And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

Revelation 20:6 Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

Revelation 22:7 "And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

Revelation 22:14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

[3] Nancy Guthrie, *Blessed: Experiencing the Promise of the Book of Revelation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022).