

THE FRAMEWORK OF REVELATION, REVELATION 1:1-3

Let's turn in our Bibles, please, to the book of Revelation chapter 1. We're going to be reading together the first three verses of Revelation chapter 1. Revelation chapter 1, verses 1 through 3:

“¹The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: ²who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. ³Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”

Having spent the last six weeks introducing the book of Revelation, we now come to the exposition of the book itself. It's important for us to understand that the book of Revelation takes up where the book of Daniel leaves off.

You recall that in Daniel chapter 2, Daniel has the vision of the great image of a man. You remember, the head is of gold, the arms and the chest are of silver, the waist and the thighs are of brass, and the legs are of iron. We are told in that passage that these represent four kingdoms, four world empires. The head of gold, of course, represented Babylon, which was then extant; the arms of silver, the MedoPersian Empire; the thighs of brass, the Greek Empire under Alexander the Great; and then finally, the iron legs representing the Roman Empire, which of course was the empire in existence when Jesus came into the world.

In this vision in Daniel chapter 2, Daniel then saw a stone that was cut out without hands. It was cast at the image and it smote the image and completely smashed it and destroyed it and turned it into powder. The stone then grew and became a great mountain that filled the whole earth. Now this stone, of course, is Christ and His kingdom, which will overcome the Roman Empire, and the kingdom of God will then spread to fill the entire earth.

So this image, this picture, was designed to convey a message and the message was given to King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel said to King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2, verse 28 and verses 44 to 45, These are the things that will occur in the last days.

Well, the four kingdoms came into existence and went out of existence. We had the Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar; the MedoPersian Empire under Darius; the Greek Empire under Alexander the Great; and finally, the Roman Empire under the Caesars. And now here we are at about 95, 96 A.D., and Rome, as you're well aware, eventually withered and went away. It was destroyed. And what replaced it but the kingdom of God?

So we see that the kingdom of God starts out with these twelve little disciples, the apostles. And now what has happened? That kingdom has grown and has filled the entire earth. There is no nation on the face of the earth where there is not a Christian witness and a Christian church and a

Christian community. Christianity is the world's largest religion, by far—twice as big as the next closest—billions and billions of people.

So the last days have arrived. The last days, of course, are the days between the first and the second coming of Christ, the last covenantal period before the end of the world. A lot of people think that the last days have yet to come. Well, we've been in the last days for the last 2,000 years. It says in Hebrews chapter 1, verse 1, "1 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son..."

The reason why the last 2,000 years have been the "last" is because it's the last covenantal period before the consummation of all things. You'll recall we had the Noahic Covenant, then we had the Old Covenant, and Davidic Covenant, and now we're in the New Covenant, which Jesus established at the Last Supper, when He said, "This is the new covenant in my blood." So we're in the last covenantal period before the consummation of all things.

What Daniel said in Daniel chapter 2 is going occur in the latter days, and John says here in Revelation 1 and verse 1, that the time is at hand. We're there. What Daniel spoke of, about the stone coming and smashing, that just happened. And now it's growing and it's going to fill the whole earth. The great stone, Jesus Christ, has now appeared to build His kingdom that is going to transcend and destroy all the kingdoms of this world, and the book of Revelation records the conflict involved in the growth of that stone and the building of that kingdom. And we read that ultimately, the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever.

So that's where we're at in the eschatological timetable—we are in the last days. The stone has smitten the kingdoms of the world, it is now growing and filling the whole earth, and ultimately, all the kingdoms of the world will become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ. However, that's not going to happen without a lot of conflict, without a lot of pushback. We talked about that pushback this morning, you recall, in our Scripture reading. Paul was trying to spread the gospel, and Satan and his people were trying to destroy the progress of the gospel. Well, who won? Paul won, didn't he? He wrote half the New Testament. He's got billions of followers. Where are the followers of Festus and Felix and his crowd? Nowhere. The Roman kingdom is gone and has been gone for a long time.

John opens this book of Revelation with a prologue, in which we are told where this book came from, what it contains, and why it's important that we take heed to its message and obey its precepts. So what we want to do this morning is to look at this prologue in these first three verses, because it provides us with background and framework for all the rest of what we're going to be looking at in the remainder of the book.

In the first place then this morning, let's consider together the source of the book of Revelation. The source of the book of Revelation is spoken of in the first part of verse 1, where it says, "The

Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him.” The very first word in the original language of this book is the word *apokalupsis*, which means to unveil or to reveal, and from it we derive this word *revelation*. In the Greek, the word is *apokalupsis*, which we translate *revelation*. It just simply means to unveil. The word means to uncover something that is hidden so we might see that which we could never perceive on our own.

In this book, God reveals to us what we could never know unless He told us about it, and that’s why it is a revelation; it is a revealing of things that we could never know. Specifically, we’re told that this is the revelation of Jesus Christ; that is, it is the revelation that belongs to Him and which He provides to us. Jesus Christ has a revelation to give to us.

Where did this revelation that Jesus has to give to us come from? Verse 1 specifically says that God the Father gave this revelation to Jesus Christ. Notice, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him.” We see this gift of God the Father to God the Son being transferred in Revelation chapter 5. Turn for a moment to the fifth chapter of Revelation. Revelation 5:

“¹ And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book.” What book is that? It’s the book of Revelation. “¹ And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. ² And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? ³ And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. ⁴ And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.

“⁵ And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. ⁶ And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. ⁷ And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints. ⁹ And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; ¹⁰ and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”

So here is the story of the transfer of the book of Revelation from God the Father to God the Son. God the Son starts opening the seals of the book, and as He does so progressively, new information is revealed, and thus we have the revelation. The way these books or scrolls worked, by the way, is you would write something and roll it up, put a little bit of wax there, and that would seal that section of the book. Then you would write some more, put a little piece of wax there, roll it up, and that would seal that section. Thus, the book was all rolled up, written on the

inside and the outside, and there were these progressive seals that were broken to reveal the next section of what it was that this book contained.

This book is the revelation, we're told, of Jesus Christ. As its seals are opened, we have the unveiling and the revealing of the things that will occur and that will characterize the future, from the time of John until the final consummation of all things. So the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God the Father gave to Him, is this book, sealed with seven seals, which, when they are opened, reveal the things that will characterize the age between the first and the second coming of Christ, namely, these last days in which we're living. So, then, the source of the book of is it is a gift of the Father to the Son.

Having seen the source of the book of Revelation, in the second place this morning, let us consider together the recipients of the book of Revelation. It says in verse 1, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him,"—now here's the recipients—"to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass."

We see that when God the Father gave this revelation to God the Son, that the Lord Jesus Christ did not just keep it to Himself. He didn't just put it in His pocket and then go off and read it all by Himself somewhere. We're specifically told that God gave this revelation to Jesus so that Jesus might show these things to His servants. They're the recipients of the book—the servants of Jesus Christ. In other words, this book is a book for the people of God. This is a book for those who are the servants of Jesus Christ. This is a book for the ordinary Christian.

Now let me ask you a question. Are you a servant of Jesus Christ? Well if you are, then this book was written to you and it was written for you. It is Christ's intention that you read it, it is Christ's intention that you understand it, it is Christ's intention that you obey it, and it is Christ's intention that you draw great comfort from it.

This book was not made for the scholar. It wasn't made for the highly advanced Christian who has degrees in biblical studies. It was made for and given to those who serve Jesus Christ every day, in all the ways that His word prescribes, according to their calling and according to their station in life. What this means is that this book is not over your head, and this book is not beyond your grasp. That's not to say that it's easy to understand. You have to do some work to grasp its message and its meaning. But if you do that work, if you pay attention to the expositions of the book, you can understand and apply the message of this book with confidence that you are on the right track as you do so.

Furthermore, this book is not primarily for those who live at some distant point in the future, when the Great Tribulation finally comes. Notice, he says that the purpose of this revelation which the Father gave to the Son was to show unto His servants—notice the next phrase in verse 1—"things which must shortly come to pass." The things which must *shortly* come to pass. In other words, the events prophesied in this book were to immediately start commencing in John's day. What John describes in this book was to begin in his own lifetime so that when

those who got the book read it, they would say, Oh—These things are starting right now. They're happening now.

Notice what it says in verse 3: “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein:”—here it is—“for the time is at hand.” Right in the prologue, we are told twice that what he’s writing is starting to be experienced and seen and fulfilled right now. What John describes was to start in his own lifetime and was immediately relevant to firstcentury believers. But though what John prophesizes will begin in his lifetime, it will not end in his lifetime. What Revelation reveals is inaugurated now, but will go on being carried out until the second coming of Christ. The spiritual warfare that accompanies the establishment and the expansion and the final victory of the kingdom of God is beginning in John’s day, and it is carried out in every subsequent generation. And it will conclude with the second coming of Christ.

When did the stone smash the feet? When Jesus came, right? What did the stone do after that? It grew and filled the whole earth, right? Well, the book of Revelation describes the smashing and the growth, till the end. So clearly, it covers that entire time period, and has application to every single generation throughout that time period. Therefore, this revelation given by Jesus Christ is relevant to John in his generation, and it’s relevant to every subsequent generation until Jesus returns.

So we see that the recipients of this book are all the servants of Christ from the time it was written until the time of the second coming. It has direct relevance to every servant of Christ in every generation in whatever century he happens to live. It wasn’t just for all firstcentury Christians, or just all those who live a few years before the second coming. It has equal application to every generation, all throughout the time period between the first and second coming. Thus, the recipients.

That brings us to our third point. Having seen the source of the book of Revelation and the recipients of the book of Revelation, notice thirdly, the messengers of the book of Revelation. It says in verse 1, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass;”—now here’s the messengers—“and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.” He sent and signified it—notice—by his angel unto His servant John.

It’s important for us to understand that the message of the book of Revelation is transmitted through five parties. It begins with and finds its origin in God the Father, number 1. Number 2, He gives it to God the Son, Jesus Christ. The message now belongs to Him. It’s the revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus then sent this message by means of signs and symbols to His angel. Then the angel turns around and he shows it to John. Then John, through the writing of this book, shows it to His servants—that’s us. God the Father, God the Son, the angel, John, and us.

When it says “he sent and signified it,” that word “signify” is a very interesting word. You need to pay attention to that word. It means to communicate by symbols. The word “signify” means to communicate with signs, or with symbols. Ordinarily, we communicate with words, right? But you recall that in our introduction to this book we said that the book of Revelation is not ordinary prose, but rather it is a series of symbolically illustrated pictures. So you have beasts with ten heads and seven horns, and all these various things, right? All these very strange pictures. Those are the signs, or communication by means of signs or symbols, that are being spoken of here in verse 1.

So God gave to His Son the revelation. The Son then gave it to the angel, and the angel then gave it to John. Now notice, if you will, chapter 17, verse 1: “And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters.” So here’s a clear example of what’s being talked about in chapter 1 and verse 1. The angel says to John, Come here—I’m going to show you a picture. And he shows a picture of this whorish woman sitting on the back of this beast. And that’s the picture.

Notice, if you will, Revelation 22, the very last chapter in the book, looking back over the book and summarizing what the book has to say and how it was transmitted. Chapter 22, verse 8: “⁸ And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things.”

Clearly, in Revelation 1:1, John says the angel showed him this stuff, and at the end of the book, John says the angel showed him this stuff. So this is how these visual images were transmitted to John. They were transmitted to him via an angel.

God the Father gives the book to God the Son; God the Son gives it to the angel; the angel gives it to John; and John finally communicates this revelation to all of Christ’s servants by means of this book which he wrote.

Look at verses 18 and 19 in chapter 22: “¹⁸ For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this *book*, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this *book*: ¹⁹ and if any man shall take away from the words of the *book* of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the *book* of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this *book*.” Do you see all the mentions of this *book*? He mentions it five times. He’s saying, I have a book. This is the book. And through this book, he transmits it finally to the servants of Jesus Christ.

If you would, please turn back to Revelation chapter 1, and notice verse 11. Jesus is saying to John, “. . . I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia.” So in the beginning, there wasn’t a book. Jesus says, You’re going to be shown some stuff; write it all down. He was shown stuff; he

wrote it all down. And at the end he says, It's written. Don't add to it, don't take away from it. This is the revelation. He was told to write and he wrote.

These, then, are the five stages of transmission, and the stress is upon the divine origin of this revelation. The point is that John did not fabricate this out of an overwrought imagination. I remember witnessing to a female drug addict, and back then the drug of choice was LSD, which gave you hallucinations. She told me she'd read the Bible, and that when she read Revelation, it was clear to her that John was on an LSD trip, seeing all this stuff.

Well, people come to all sorts of wrong ideas about where the book came from, what its source was. Therefore, it's important to emphasize that this is a book of divine origin, and the reason it is written in this fashion is because it's intended to be a picturebook. And as you look at each of the pictures, you draw from them the meaning that was intended to be conveyed. These pictures are caricatures. Like when you read a political cartoon, you don't expect to take those images in that political cartoon literally; they're caricatures, But they do convey to you a very clear and literal message.

In the same way, we don't look for beasts that actually have something like ten heads and seven horns on each head. Those are pictures that are designed to convey a message, and we view them as symbols, not as things that literally exist.

So this book is not something John fabricated out of an overwrought imagination. Its source is God the Father, and therefore, it is inerrant. It isn't fallible. And it is authoritative, it is not of human origin. Therefore, it can be trusted as a safe guide as to the spiritual warfare that we will face, and the outcomes we may expect as we participate in the worldwide expansion of the kingdom of God until the end of time.

That brings us to our fourth point. We're back in Revelation chapter 1, verses 1 to 3. Having seen the source of the book of Revelation, the recipients, and the messengers, notice in the fourth place, the content. That's in verse 2: "Who bare record," talking about John here as the antecedent of the personal pronoun "who"—that is, his servant John, "bare record"—notice—"of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw."

When John wrote this book, he was fully aware of what he was writing, and he was fully aware that what he was writing was no ordinary communication. Now if I sit down and write a letter to you, that's just ordinary communication, and I know it. I know it's not like some divine missive from God, right? But when John was writing, he was aware that it was not just something he came up with. These are not just interesting ideas he had; he is writing for another.

So John bore record, notice first of all, "of the word of God." In other words, he explicitly says right up front, These are not my words. This is the word of God. It was not the word of man. It proceeded out of the mind of the Father, and came with all the majesty and the authority of God the Father Himself.

When it says that he bore record of the word of God, I think this also includes all the Old Testament allusions that he brings out as he goes through the book of Revelation. You remember we talked about the fact that there are more allusions to the Old Testament in the book of Revelation than there are in all the rest of the New Testament books put together. The book of Revelation is saturated with references to the Old Testament. So when John says he bares testimony to the word of God, he's not only talking about the word that proceeds from God, but he's talking about all the words of God that have already been given in the Old Testament.

Secondly, he says he bore record not only "of the word of God," but "of the testimony of Jesus Christ," verse 2. Chapter 1 verse 1 says, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ," right? It's His; He gave it. Therefore, as John is writing, he's saying, I am writing the testimony of Jesus. These are Jesus' words. This is what Jesus is telling me. If you notice chapter 1 and verse 11, Jesus says, "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last," a clear reference to Christ, "and, What thou seest, write in a book." John says that's the testimony he wrote—the testimony of Jesus Christ.

So John testified regarding Christ's identity, His authority. Notice verse 18. Jesus says, "I am that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." That speaks of His triumphant, transcendent, exalted authority over all things. If you have authority over hell and over death, you've got ultimate authority, right?

John talks about His identity—He's the first and the last, He's the alpha and omega; he talks about His authority—He has the keys of hell and death; and he talks about His kingly instruction to His servants—as he writes to the churches, you see that Christ is the head of each church. Chapter 2:1: "Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." So we see that Christ has kingly authority over every single Christian and over single church.

When John says he's writing about the testimony of Christ, he's writing about the identity of Christ, the authority of Christ, the commandments of Christ that He gives to His church, and he is saying that these are the words of Jesus.

Notice chapter 22. Turn there please, if you would. What's fascinating are the parallels between Revelation 1 and Revelation 22. Revelation 1 says, Here's what we're going to do. And Revelation 22 says, We did it. Notice Revelation 22 and verse 16: "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star." So once again, Jesus is taking ownership of this book, and He says, This is *my* testimony. Here's what *I* have said to you. I said it by means of an angel to John. This is who I am. These are my words.

When John says in chapter 1 and verse 2, I bore witness to the testimony of Christ, Christ is saying, This *is* my testimony. Notice verse 18. Jesus says, "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book." And notice verse 20. "He which testifieth these

things saith, Surely I come quickly.” Three times in chapter 22, Jesus says, I’m taking ownership now of what John wrote. This is mine. So as you read the book of Revelation, you’re not only reading the word of God, you’re reading the word of Jesus Christ. Of course we would expect that, since Jesus is God, right?

So this whole book is the testimony of Jesus Christ to His people regarding the nature and the outcome of their spiritual warfare and of the end and the goal toward which that spiritual warfare is proceeding.

Now turn back, please, to Revelation 1. Revelation 1, verse 2. There’s a third thing John says he bore witness to. He says in verse 2 he bore record of the word of God; and then secondly, he bore record of the testimony of Jesus Christ; and then thirdly, he bore record “of all things that he saw”—not what he heard, though he did hear a lot of things. But this is primarily, as we said, a book of visual imagery. It’s stuff you see. As you look at the picture, then you draw out the meaning.

It’s kind of like a parable. What is a parable? A parable is a visual picture, isn’t it—the sower went forth to sow; the pearl of great price. The Lord is my shepherd—metaphorical language. He leads me beside the still waters; green pastures. It’s a visual picture, right? And that’s what’s going on here. Not only do we have the word of the Father and the testimony of the Son, but we also have the record of the visions of John himself.

So this book was not handed to John intact. Remember, the Father gave the book to the Son. The Son didn’t just take the book and hand it to John. Rather, through the angel, he gave visions—stuff John saw. This book was not handed to John intact; it did not arise by means of God speaking to him through some inner voice; rather, we’re specifically told that John *saw* these things. Notice once again chapter 1 and verse 11. Jesus says, “I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou *seest*, write in a book.”

So this comes back to what I said in my introductory messages, and that is, this is a book of visions. It’s a book of visual images and symbolic representations of what is going to occur all throughout the future between the first and second coming of Christ, in the last days, while the stone is growing to fill the earth. These visions had their source in God the Father, they were shown to John by God’s angel while John was on the Island of Patmos, and that is what the content of the book is.

That brings us to our fifth and final point this morning. We have seen the source of the book of Revelation, the recipients of the book, the messengers of the book, the content of the book, now fifthly, the blessing of the book of Revelation. Notice chapter 1, verse 3. Here’s the blessing of the book. “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”

Verse 3 is really what we call a beatitude, much like the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. You remember those: blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are they that mourn; blessed are the meek; blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness. Well, the book of Revelation also contains beatitudes. In fact, there are seven of them. And are you surprised? Seven, of course, is the number of completeness, and those who follow Christ faithfully and who do not abandon Christ under the persecution of the world are completely blessed in every respect, in every way, for all eternity.

I can't expound each of these. I'm going to just briefly survey through these seven with you so you'll know where they're at. We have this one in Revelation 1:3, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand."

Then notice, if you will, chapter 14 and verse 13. "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." That's my favorite funeral text. I've used that text many times preaching at funerals. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. And if there's sound reason to believe that the person who is deceased has been a Christian, then that's the text—Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.

What he's saying is, Be faithful to death, and I'll give you a crown of life. We don't say, Oh, they might kill me! Therefore, I better renounce Christ. No. If they kill me, I'll really be blessed. So I'm willing to die for Christ.

Next, Revelation 16:15. "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame." So those who remain faithful to Christ are blessed.

Notice Revelation 19:9. It says, "And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." Will you be blessed if you're at the marriage supper? You will be blessed!

Revelation 20 and verse 6. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power." You'll never go to hell if you're in the first resurrection.

Revelation 22 and verse 7. "Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book." This is really pretty much a repetition of Revelation 1, verse 3.

Revelation 22:14. "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."

One of the things that the book of Revelation does is it encourages us to be faithful in spiritual warfare and not give up when they throw us in prison and when they persecute us and when they

put us to death. The way the book of Revelation encourages us to keep on keeping on is saying, Look at the blessing that you will have if you do. God doesn't say, Serve me like crazy and I'll just forget about it. No. I will reciprocate in a manner and to a degree that will make the present sufferings not worthy to be compared with the pleasures, the joys, the blessings, that will be revealed in us. That's in Romans 8.

The blessing of the book of Revelation consists in three particulars. Notice verse 3 of chapter 1, in particular. It says, "Blessed is he that readeth." Now that might strike you as a little funny, but we have to understand that in biblical times, not everyone had a copy of the Bible. Furthermore, not everyone could read.

Therefore, this book, like all Bible books, was read aloud in the assembly of the church. The one who did the reading aloud was called a lector. So the lector could read and write, and he would take "the" copy of the book that the church had, and he would stand up in front and read it to the congregation. So he was declared to be blessed by God for doing that public reading, because he was setting forth the word of God to the people, just by reading the Bible out loud to those around him.

Then there were those who gathered together to hear the reading. Notice verse 3: "Blessed is he that readeth," that's the public lector, "and they that hear the words of this prophecy," who were the believers who gave their full attention to the hearing of the book as it was read aloud. They listened intently as it was read so that they might not miss anything that it said.

I did that twice this morning, right? I read aloud to you Psalm 103 and Acts chapter 24. I did my best to read it with an engaged mind, and I hope you did your best to listen to it with an engaged mind, and that while the word of God was being read, you were focused, you were paying attention, you were listening intently, you were thinking about what was said, and you were asking God to apply it your life. And when the word of God is read and you hear it *that way*, you are blessed.

Now if while I'm reading, you're thinking: Ah, you know, I've gotta replace the transmission of my car, and there's a pile of dirty dishes in the sink. And then I get to the end—okay, let's sing. That doesn't work, right? You're not going to get blessing from the word of God just being read while your mind is somewhere else. You've got to pay attention. So, blessed is he who reads, blessed is he who hears.

Notice thirdly, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy,"—here it is—"and keep those things which are written therein." So it's not enough to merely read the book or hear it read. Those things alone do not result in the blessedness that is pronounced. They the readers, and we the hearers, must keep those things that are written in this book, that is, we have to obey the instructions and commands it conveys to us if we would have the comforts and the outcomes and the blessedness that this book speaks of.

The time for this obedience to what this book instructs us to do is not some point in the distant future. Notice the very last phrase of verse 3: “for the time is at hand.” Once again, what John is saying is that the time for these things that are written in this book is to occur now, and therefore, the time to obey these things that are written in this book is *now*.

Please turn back again to chapter 22. Revelation 22, verses 6 and 7. ⁶ And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. ⁷ Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that”—what?—“keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.” Verse 10: “And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand,” that is, now. Verse 14: “Blessed are they that”—what?—“do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life.”

You know, it’s never been just the professing believers that have gotten to heaven. It’s been the professing believers who actually *did* what the Lord Jesus commanded them to do that wound up at the tree of life. Now, that’s not salvation by works, but it’s saying true salvation results in a desire and a lifelong pursuit of obedience to Jesus Christ. Do we fail? You bet. Do we sin? Yes. But what’s the dominating characteristic of our life? I am not my own, I am bought with a price. Therefore, I serve God with my body and my spirit, which are His. And if that’s your disposition, it’s going to show in your behavior, isn’t it? It can’t help but.

So he says, Blessed are they who “*keep* those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.” In other words, people, have a sense of urgency about this. The time to obey the book of Revelation is right now. Revelation is not a book about events in the far distant future that we learn just for curiosity’s sake so we can show our superior understanding of how stuff is going to happen, God knows how far in the future. That’s not what it is.

Revelation is about the spiritual warfare that we must engage in right now, and the vast majority of the book talks about that spiritual warfare that every generation faces. Now then, it’s true that the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth may be in the far distant future. But the battle to build the kingdom of Christ is going on right now, and this is the battle that Revelation describes that we must fight every day, which comprises the vast bulk of the book.

Does the book talk about the second coming? Does it talk about things that are yet in the future that aren’t here yet? You bet it does. The second coming, new heavens and the new earth, isn’t here yet. Nothing we can do about them. But the vast majority of the book is about the bowls and vials and the trumpets and how that these things describe the warfare that we go through in advancing the gospel, the kingdom, in our generation and in every generation. And the encouragement that the outcome of that is always going to be is that Jesus is going to come back and give us the victory, right?

So we need to recognize that the book of Revelation isn't a book of curiosity. It's a book of commandments and a book of comforts. And the comforts encourage us to keep the commandments until the day that the second coming of Christ does occur. And you know, even if the second coming of Christ doesn't occur in our lifetime, the second coming of Christ will occur for *you* when you die.

That's why it's so important not to think, Well, it's a long way off, I don't need to worry about it. You could die in the next five seconds, and that's when Christ is coming back for you, individually. And the question is, Are you ready? Have you repented of your sins? Are you trusting in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? Have you said: *O, God, be merciful to me, a sinner! I trust in your Son to save me from my sins, and He, from henceforth will be my Lord and Master, and I will serve Him and be His disciple, learn to obey all things whatever He's commanded me, and I know He'll be with me till the end of the world.?*

That is saving faith, and for those who have that, when Jesus comes for them individually at their death, He says to them, Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. May God help us to be a people who recognize the imperative of obedience being the manifestation of the genuineness of true saving faith. So we say to the Lord Jesus, along with the apostle Paul, What wilt thou have me to do? Jesus says, All that stuff in the book of Revelation?—That's what I want you to do.

So as we go through the book and we see the instructions, that's what we're supposed to be doing now, as we fight the spiritual warfare in the establishment of the expansion of the kingdom of God to fill the whole earth and to ultimately result in the consummation of the coming of Jesus Christ. Well, let's pray together.

Our Father, we're so grateful for this book, and we're thankful that it's written to us. We're the servants. And Father, help us to not only hear what it says, but to do what it instructs. Help us to have a sense of urgency about that, knowing that now is the time. These things are shortly taking place, and of course, it was 2,000 years ago that that was written, which means that they're certainly taking place now, and have in every generation, and will in every generation until Jesus comes.

Father, may we be faithful in the spiritual warfare and stand firm, even in the face of opposition like Paul did, so that the gospel would go forward and we would not just give up when hard times come and difficulties arise. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.