

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Revelation 1:1-20

The day is Oct. 25. The year is 1415. The place is Agincourt, France. King Henry V of England is waging a war against France. The English army is outnumbered two to one. They are far from home. They are weary and tired. They are wishing that there were more of their countrymen with them in the coming battle.

And King Henry (according to Shakespeare) rises to speak to his troops to inspire courage in their hearts.

The St. Crispin's Day Speech.

...he which hath no stomach to this fight,
Let him depart; his passport shall be made,
And crowns for convoy put into his purse;
We would not die in that man's company
That fears his fellowship to die with us.

This day is call'd [the feast of Crispian](#).

He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,
Will stand a tip-toe when this day is nam'd,
And rouse him at the name of Crispian.
He that shall live this day, and see old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,
And say "To-morrow is Saint Crispian."
Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars,
And say "These wounds I had on Crispin's day."
Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot,
But he'll remember, with advantages,
What feats he did that day. Then shall our names,
Familiar in his mouth as household words—
Harry the King, [Bedford](#) and [Exeter](#),
[Warwick](#) and [Talbot](#), [Salisbury](#) and [Gloucester](#)—
Be in their flowing cups freshly rememb'ed.
This story shall the good man teach his son;
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be rememberèd—

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;

For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition;
And gentlemen in England now a-bed
Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

What does this speech have to do with the Book of Revelation?

They are both given to war-weary soldiers in need of hope and courage to continue in the fight.

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The Christian Church is engaged in a great war. It is a war against evil. It is a war to build the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

It is not a mock war in which there are no true casualties. Men and women are strewn across the battlefield of history.

In this war, we must fight to win. We must accept that we will either conquer the foe, or he will conquer us. Our foe is so terrible, so ruthless, so foul, that surrender is suicidal.

Our enemy is relentless. He does not follow the conventional rules of war. He will use any and every strategy available to him with no remorse for his hatred and cruelty. There are no clear lines separating us from the enemy. He attacks us even in the depths of our own souls.

Some of us dream of playing some vital role in some glorious battle. But for most of us who have been fighting the enemy for any length of time, we simply want rest. We want the fighting to be over. We want the enemy to be finally and forever defeated...

Instead of rest, we are called again to form rank and march towards the enemy. We are called to hold our ground to the last. We are called to be brave even as we watch those around us being slaughtered.

This is the reality for which the book of Revelation was given: Soldiers who are beaten down, war-weary, and discouraged. Soldiers who never imagined that the war would last this long. Soldiers for whom the cost of fighting this war was far higher than they at first believed possible. Soldiers who are now aware of just how crafty, and powerful, is their enemy.

The book of Revelation is a message of the King to His weary soldiers. In this message, we are told the truth. We are told the truth about our Commander – the Lord Jesus Christ. We are also told the truth about our enemy – who it is that we are fighting against every day. And we are told the truth about ourselves – who we are as the Church, the army of the LORD and the Bride of Christ.

And we are given some explanation of what we can expect in the days ahead – mainly the nature of the warfare and the ferocity of the fighting. We are told the truth as to the difficulty of what it will mean to continue fighting.

And most important, for those who remain, our Lord gives us a guarantee of victory! And even glory!

This is the purpose of the book of Revelation. Jesus is not interested in your curiosities about future events. He wants to keep you from quitting. He wants to encourage you to not lose all hope when the battle does not appear to be going your way.

You may or not be inspired by Shakespeare's St. Crispin's Day Speech.

But you must be inspired by the message of your Lord and King to engage in the war of all wars.

Read Revelation 1:1a.

The revelation of Jesus Christ,
which God gave him
to show to his servants
the things that must soon take place.

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The Book of Revelation IS “revelation of Jesus Christ”.

The Greek word is apocalypse, the apocalypse of Jesus Christ.

It means to reveal, to uncover, to disclose.

Picture a curtain covering something important. And then the curtain is removed.

God the Father has given to Jesus Christ the right to uncover for His servants “things that must soon take place.”

Jesus is not speaking of events that will only occur long after they are gone.

They are events that they will experience, at least in part.

Of course, these events can still have their final fulfillment in the Return of Jesus Christ.

But they must also apply to the original readers.

Jesus wants to encourage His soldiers as they endure the challenges of the war in which they find themselves.

Read Revelation 1:1b-2.

2 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.

Jesus is the source of this revelation. But Jesus also makes use of an angel to lay it out for John. This is appropriate since the most basic meaning of angel is “messenger.”

Since John is the only one who actually received the message, he makes sure to tell us that this book is not full of his own ideas. What he writes for us is the very Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

John also tells us that he has written what he saw.

And John will often use words from the OT to describe what he saw.

Revelation is full of allusions to the OT.

There are many reasons for this. But one reason is to remind us that the war in which we are engaged has been raging long before we ever arrived on the field of battle.

Read Revelation 1:3.

3 Blessed is the one
 who reads aloud the words of this prophecy,
 and
 blessed are those
 who hear,

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and
who keep what is written in it,
for the time is near.

John is not giving us the promise that Revelation is some magical spell. Read its words with your head held in the right position, and poof... blessing will be yours.

John is only giving the blessing that is promised to all who receive God's Word with sincere faith.

John expects that this book would be read aloud in public worship. Not everyone would have had their own copy of the book.

And he makes clear that what is heard must be combined with faith. To "keep" the word is to take it to heart, to believe it as truth, and to not forget it when you leave this room. And if you take it to heart, it follows that you will strive to live your life according to it. Revelation is a call to action.

Read Revelation 1:4.

4 John
 to the seven churches that are in Asia:
 Grace to you
 and
 peace

John is writing to seven known churches of his day in what is now known as Turkey. I will talk about why he chooses these seven in a bit. For now, just know that there were more churches than these seven in this region. For instance, the church of Colossai is left out.

John greets these churches with the typical greeting that we see at the beginning of Paul's letters. Grace to you and peace.

Even though this book is a call to action, it is an action that can only occur as God sovereignly and graciously provides for you.

Grace and peace are at the very heart of the Gospel. The Christian life of obedience always flows out of the fountain of God's powerful working in us. As in all of God's Word, it is given to strengthen you, to feed you, to encourage you. Augustine once said, "Lord, command what you will, give what you command."

Let me read to you one example from Paul of his greeting so we can compare it with that of John.

1 Corinthians 1:3 ³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation 1:4-5

from him who is and who was and who is to come,
and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,
⁵ and from Jesus Christ
the faithful witness,
the firstborn of the dead,
and the ruler of kings on earth.

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John expands the source of Grace and Peace.

Look at the word “from” in these verses.

- From him who is and who was and who is to come.
- From the seven spirits who are before the throne
- From Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

John wants us to see that grace and peace flow from the Trinity. And he alters the order. He places the Spirit in the middle: the Father, the Spirit, and then the Son.

This is purposeful.

First, the Father:

Grace to you and peace...

from him
who is
and
who was
and
who is to come,

At first glance this phrase makes us think of Jesus Christ. It is terminology that is used for Jesus Christ. He is the One who is coming back. Revelation ends with a call “Come, Lord Jesus.”

But it is best to see this statement as referring to the eternity of the Father.

John is using language that sparks thoughts of Jesus to describe the Father.

Why would he want to do this?

Because John wants us to understand the basic oneness of the Son with the Father.

ESV **John 10:30** I and the Father are one."

God the Father was and is and is to come.

He is the only eternal God who has no rivals.

The fact that this is also true of the Son is the point. Every glory that can be said of the Father can also be said of the Son.

Only of God Almighty can it be said “who was and is and is to come.”

The second “from” is a reference to the Holy Spirit, the Second Person of the Trinity. Himself fully God in essence. But instead of stating simply “from the Holy Spirit”, John speaks of seven spirits.

Grace to you and peace...

and
from the seven spirits
who are before his throne,

Nowhere else in Scripture is the One Holy Spirit described as “seven spirits”.

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Our natural inclination is to think that these must be seven other spirits and not the Holy Spirit.

But these spirits are wedged like a sandwich between statements of the Father and the Son. And we cannot get around the fact that “Grace and peace” come to the Church through these seven spirits. And everywhere else in Scripture “grace and peace” only come from God.

So, John wants us to identify these seven spirits with the One Holy Spirit, the 3rd Person of the Trinity. But why not just say, “from the Holy Spirit” or “from the Spirit of Christ” or “from the Spirit of God”? Why describe the Holy Spirit as “seven spirits” who are before his throne?

Just as John wants us to associate the Father and the Son as one, he also wants us to associate the Spirit with the Church.

John wants us to consider the Holy Spirit as He who indwells the Church.

He does not want us to think of the Holy Spirit as God “apart from the Church”, but rather “in union with the Church”.

When Jesus was about to depart this world, He promised that He would not leave them as orphans, alone and abandoned in the world. He promised to send them the Helper. The Holy Spirit was not promised to the disciples alone, or to some portion of the Church. The Spirit was promised to the entirety of the Church.

John expresses the entirety of the Church by using the number seven.

Seven is a number of completion or fullness.

God created the world in six days and on the 7th Day He rested.

John addresses seven specific churches in Asia Minor, but these seven are chosen to represent the whole Church.

Since the Holy Spirit indwells the “whole” Church, then the Spirit is described as “seven spirits” to indicate that truth.

Not only does the Spirit indwell the whole Church, the Spirit is the One who brings the whole Church “before the throne of the Father and the Son”.

The book of Hebrews makes clear that every member of the Church has access before the throne of God by the blood of Christ. But here, we see that it is the Holy Spirit that brings the Church before the throne of God.

We are united to Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. We have access to Almighty God because of this union.

The members of the Church in Asia Minor were being ridiculed and persecuted. They were not respected or thought well of. But from God’s perspective, the Church is continually brought before Him by the Holy Spirit.

In just a little while, you will leave this place. You will go out into a harsh world that seeks to destroy your faith in Jesus Christ. Many voices will mock your being a member of the Church. Many will tell you of the faults of the Church. Many will tell you that you are foolish to remain a member of God’s Church. They

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Jesus encourages His people to not fear death. He has endured its clutches and sprung free from them in the resurrection that will also be theirs.

Revelation is a book about conquering. But it is not the typical sort of conquering. The English conquered the French at Agincourt by killing more of the French. Jesus promises that the Church will conquer even as she is being killed. Why? Because we conquer in the same way that our King has conquered – through death.

Lastly, John tells us that Jesus is:

and
the ruler of kings on earth.

Even though the Roman rulers were harshly threatening the Christians, they could continue to believe that Jesus was continuing to rule over them. No matter how harsh the persecution from ungodly governments, they only ruled under the sovereign hand of Jesus Christ.

No king of the earth threatens the rule of our Savior and Lord.
Every generation of the Church must call to mind that the kings of the earth do not sovereignly rule their kingdoms. Jesus rules from heaven over them all, even as they persecute His beloved Bride.

As John reflects on His Lord and Savior, he responds with a doxology.

A doxology is a statement attributing glory to God.

In this case we are to give glory to Jesus.

To him
 who loves us
 and
 has freed us from our sins
 by his blood
6 and
 made us a kingdom,
 priests to his God and Father,
to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Why should we give glory to Jesus? Because...

1. Jesus loves us.
 - a. Even when He allows us to suffer in this life, even at the hands of evil men, we are to be reminded that He loves us.
2. Jesus has freed us from our sins by his blood.
 - a. Even when we are taken prisoner by evil men, we are to remember that we are free in the only way that really matters. We are free from our sins: Both their dominion over us and the guilt we deserve because of them.
3. Jesus made us a kingdom
 - a. We may not have a place in the kingdoms of this world. But we belong to the Kingdom of our Lord and Savior – Jesus Christ. And His kingdom is the only kingdom that will endure through all eternity.

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- b. Not only are we subjects of Jesus' kingdom, but we are also "Priests to His God and Father".
 - i. We stand before the God of the Universe and serve Him.
 - ii. We have eternal value. We are not small and insignificant like the world sees us. We are priests – having been given holy duties.

Encouraging right?!!

Suffering awaits the soldiers of Jesus' army.
But suffering is not the end.

Read Revelation 1:7.

7 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.

Jesus is coming. This is the great Christian hope. Jesus is coming "in the sky" out of heaven. He is coming "on the clouds" referring to the glory of God.
Jesus is coming with glory.

When Jesus comes do not worry whether you will get a good seat. You will be able to see him wherever you are, even if you are lying in the dust of the earth. Everyone will be able to see Jesus when He comes, even those who have pierced him. This is more than a statement of handful of people at the cross. This is a statement of all of us who have pierced Him with our sins.

Believers and unbelievers alike of every age will see Jesus when He returns. That means that when Jesus returns it will be the same moment as the General Resurrection of all men. My hope is not in a secret rapture of men before the final resurrection. My hope is in the one moment when Jesus returns and all who are in their graves rise from the dead.

Those who have believed in Jesus will enter into eternal life.
But those who have not believed in Jesus will be judged to an eternal torment.
This is why all the tribes of the earth will wail because of him.
The coming of Christ means the end of their supposed reign.

Things will change when Jesus returns.

Read Revelation 1:8.

8 "I am
the Alpha and the Omega,"

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says the Lord God,

"who is and who was and who is to come,
the Almighty."

This verse is a clear statement of Jesus Christ, the One who is coming.
What is true of God in general, and the Father, is true of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus comes, we are to know that it is God Almighty who is coming.
Verse 8 rises us to the peak of the mountain.
In verse 9, John takes us back down to the valley.

Read Revelation 1:9

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.

John has waited to identify himself until verse 9. This is purposeful.
What does he say about himself?
He is their brother and partner.
He is their brother in Christ.
He is their partner in tribulation, the kingdom, and in patient endurance. All of which are in Jesus.

John is identifying himself with the rest of the Church.
John is suffering. The Christians of Asia Minor are also suffering.
John is receiving the kingdom of Christ. The Christians of Asia Minor are also receiving the kingdom of Christ.
John is patiently waiting for Jesus to return to rule the earth. The Christians of Asia Minor are also patiently enduring until the coming of Jesus.

There is an expectation that those to whom the Kingdom of Christ belong will suffer tribulation until Jesus returns.

Before death, before the resurrection from the dead, Christians are called to endure suffering.
That is what we do.
We do not all suffer to the same degree, or in the same way, but we are all called to suffer tribulation in this life.

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We should not have an expectation of a relief from suffering until we die or Jesus returns. The Church's suffering and the Church's giving glory to Christ must occur simultaneously.

Read Revelation 1:10.

10 I was in the Spirit
on the Lord's day,
and
I heard behind me a loud voice
like a trumpet

Why is the loud voice compared to a trumpet?

The trumpet was used to signal God's people to assemble and hear a message, as well as a signal to call God's people to war.

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."

John lists the churches in a clockwise manner, beginning with Ephesus. But it is not the location of the various churches that matters. What is important is the placement of real churches next to the vision of the Lord Jesus. The people hearing this letter would have recognized themselves in the story. And so should we. Revelation is not a book about some people far away. It is a book about us, the Church.

We should read Revelation as if John said to the church in Morganton and Marion and Lenoir and Valdese and Old Fort and Rutherford College. John is addressing real churches with real members who are struggling to maintain their faith in the face of suffering and persecution.

Read Revelation 1:12-18.

12 Then
I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me,
and
on turning I saw
seven golden lampstands,
13 and in the midst of the lampstands

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one like a son of man,
clothed with a long robe
and
with a golden sash around his chest.
14 The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow.
His eyes were like a flame of fire,
15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace,
and
his voice was like the roar of many waters.
16 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.

I have studied and taught this passage many times. Usually, my attention was drawn to the multifaceted vision of Jesus Christ. Nothing wrong with that. Much of the focus in Revelation is to see Jesus risen and exalted. But what struck me this time was the location of Jesus Christ.

The glorious Jesus Christ. The One who is both priest and king. The One who is the wisest of the wise. The One who sees all things. The One who has been tested and found true. The One who speaks and worlds come into being... this Jesus is standing "in the midst" of "seven golden lampstands".

The seven golden lampstands are the Church. The same Church that is represented in the seven churches of Asia Minor.

The fact that they are golden points to the value of the Church, and her holiness before the LORD.

The fact that Jesus is in their midst points to His sovereignty over the Church and loving care of her.

17 When I saw him,
I fell at his feet as though dead.

John does not have this reaction by choice. He is compelled to react this way. The glory of the risen Christ hits him like a bulldozer.

The members of the churches are facing many fearful enemies. There are evil forces confronting them every day. These forces are pressuring you to bow before them. But none of these forces compare with the Awesomeness of the Living Lord Jesus. You may be fearful of the evil forces around you, but Jesus does not fear them. In fact, Jesus is the One who invokes fear in all who come before Him.

We believe in the omnipresence of the LORD. But we do not believe that He is everywhere present in the same way. John is seeing Jesus in His glory. This is the truth. Jesus is reigning in glory right now. Jesus is also present with us. But His presence with us is not in glory. Otherwise, we would all be flat on our faces.

In this vision Jesus is giving His Church a glimpse into heavenly realities so that they can by faith be strengthened.

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You must await Jesus' return before you will see Jesus like this. But you can see this Jesus now through the eyes of faith. You can lay hold of this truth without seeing it with your own eyes.

But it is not enough to see Jesus as awesome.

You must also feel His hand upon you and hear His comforting voice.

But
he laid his right hand on me, saying,
"Fear not,

The One who is so powerful and pure that you feel like you are going to die in His presence, touches you with His hand. And then speaks to you words that seem unthinkable: Fear not.

Again, in this life, you will not ever be touched by the physical hand of Christ. But Jesus wants you to feel His touch through the instrument of faith. Jesus touches you and speaks to you as he touches and speaks to John.

Jesus continues to speak comforting words to John.

18 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.

When he says, "I am the first and the last" you must hear "I am the Ruler of history." It is not the powerful evil forces around you that are in control. I control all history.

When he says, "I am the living one," you are to hear, "I am not some lifeless idol, or even some hero of old. I am the living Lord, even though you cannot see Me."

And when he says, "I was dead, and behold, I am living forever," You must hear Him say, "I am immortal. Death can no longer touch Me. I have faced death and conquered it."

And when he says, "I have the keys of Death and Hades," you must hear "It is not your enemies that control your eternal destiny. It is me. They may kill the body, but they cannot hold you in hell. I have freed you from the clutches of sin and death."

Jesus is not simply speaking to John. He is speaking to you. His words are for your benefit, to calm your fears.

What is it that you fear?

Would not those fears melt away in the presence of the Lord Jesus?

Would they not evaporate into thin air as you listen to His words?

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May the Holy Spirit impress upon you that Jesus' words are for you.
And may you receive them for yourself by faith alone.

Read Revelation 1:19-20.

¹⁹ Write therefore the things that you have seen,
those that are
and
those that are to take place after this.

In Hebrew thinking, history was divided into two great periods: the now, and the not yet.
The now relates to this present world.
And the not yet relates to the coming age that the Messiah would bring.

Revelation uncovers both of these realities.
Many of the visions of the book reveal the truth about Jesus and the Church now, what we would call the Church militant.
But many of the visions of the book reveal the truth about Jesus and the Church after the return of Christ, what we would call the Church victorious.

Jesus wants His people to be strengthened to endure because they know the truth about the now and the truth about the not yet.

²⁰ 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.

The "mystery" of the seven stars... and the seven golden lampstands...
The mystery is that even as you are being rocked by the evils of this world, even as you are struggling to maintain your faith in Jesus Christ, even as you are battling against the evil desires of our own heart...
Almighty Jesus holds you in His hand.

How can this be true?

How can it be true that as John is living out his days as a prisoner on a rocky crag of an island, that he is also being held in the palm of His Savior and Lord?

It is a mystery. But it is true.

And if you want to fight off your discouragement...

If you want to beat back the temptation to walk away from Christ...

If you want to be strengthened to continue fighting in a war against your own flesh...

If you want to overcome the fears that flood in relentlessly against your soul...

You must believe the mystery.

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