

An Introduction to Revelation

Revelation 1-5

By Voddie Baucham

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Revelation 1:1
Preached on: Sunday, May 27, 2012

Grace Family Baptist Church
106 Bammel Westfield Rd
Houston TX 77090

Website: www.gracefamilybaptist.net
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/gracefamilybaptist

There are a couple of very interesting surveys that I have been made aware of. One was a survey of a book in the Bible that members of churches would most like to have taught, another was a survey of the books of the Bible that preachers least desire to teach, and the same book was at the top of both lists, it's the book of Revelation. Revelation is the book that people want to hear taught and it's the book that preachers don't want to teach, and it's the book that we embark on beginning today. Now, if you don't learn anything else from our journey through the book of Revelation, I want you to learn this: the title of the book has no "s" on the end of it. Amen, somebody. If you don't learn anything else today, learn that it is Revelation, not Revelations. It's just one Revelation, amen? Here's a trick if you have trouble with putting the "s" on the end of the book, now, I will undoubtedly do that now that I have told you not to, but here's a trick if you want to make yourself aware of that: put "the" on the front of it. So if you say "the Revelation," you're less likely to put an "s" on the end of it. Or put "John's Revelation." It's hard to say John's Revelations, okay, so just "John's Revelation" or "the Revelation" and you'll be in good territory.

Revelation is the last book in the Bible. If you have your Bibles with you, open to that book. We read from it for our call to worship this morning. And as we begin this journey, here are some encouraging words from Vern Poythress. He writes, "Can you understand the book of Revelation? Yes, you can. You can summarize its message in one sentence: God rules history and will bring it to its consummation in Christ. Read it with this main point in mind and you will understand. You will not necessarily understand every detail, neither do I, but it is not necessary to understand every detail in order to profit spiritually." That last point is crucial: it is not necessary to understand every detail in the book of Revelation in order to profit spiritually from the book. In fact, we find here in the prologue that it is of great benefit just to hear it read, amen? I would encourage you, by the way, as we begin this journey to read this book aloud in your family worship time; to read through it in chunks, in one sitting if you're able to do that. It will benefit you greatly. It was made to be read aloud and it is different when you hear it read aloud. It is meant to be read as a whole. When you read it as a whole, there are patterns that you see in the book that you don't if you take a sort of atomistic approach to the letter.

What I want us to do today is to get a feel for the flow of the book of Revelation. My job this morning is to give you an introduction, an overview of this letter. But before I do that, let's read chapter 1.

1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 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. 4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood 6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 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. 8 I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." 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. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 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." 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 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 white wool, like 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. 17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. 19 Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. 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.

I believe it's the most beautiful book in the New Testament but by far, by a longshot, the most beautiful letter in the New Testament and unfortunately we don't read it, we don't

study it, we don't teach it, we don't even open it, and unfortunately in most instances, we don't preach it. Kim Riddlebarger says, "In many ways Revelation is the most practical book of the entire New Testament since it is specifically written to Christians who live in the post-apostolic age. This means that the symbols and visions we find here are meant for us therefore we must make every effort to interpret them correctly and apply them to our present context."

There are several attitudes toward the book of Revelation. One attitude toward the book is fear. We are just absolutely afraid of this book. We are afraid of what it means. We are afraid of what it alludes to. We are afraid of not being able to understand it. We are afraid of the language. We are afraid of the symbols. We are afraid of the creatures. We are afraid of the judgments. We are simply afraid. That's the wrong attitude. This is, after all, the word of God, amen?

Another attitude is to marginalize the book. Martin Luther himself dismissed it as, this is a quote from Luther, "unedifying for the ordinary believer." Unedifying for the ordinary believer, and so we marginalize the book of Revelation. Now, some of this has to do with different approaches to the book and we'll talk about that but for now, just know that for some it's marginalized, for many, it's marginalized. Remember what I said: when you survey people who listen to preachers, it's the number one book that they want preachers to preach from. When you survey preachers, it's the number one book on the list of books that they don't want to preach from. That in and of itself is marginalizing the book of Revelation.

And then there are those who sensationalize the book and all of a sudden the book becomes, instead of a picture book which I agree with Poythress that it is a picture book, not a puzzle book, and so we sensationalize it by treating it like a puzzle book and we go and try to find the pieces of the puzzle and we treat it as though it is so mysterious and that the interpretation thereof has to be so precise that, in fact, that sensationalism leads us away from the main purpose of the book.

Why is it difficult? It's difficult for a number of reasons. First, it's difficult because of the type of literature, apocalyptic literature. Ironically, it's the only place really in the New Testament that we find apocalyptic literature which leads to our difficulty in dealing with apocalyptic literature. Why? Because we don't like the Old Testament and we generally don't read the Old Testament, and there are many who have a theological aversion to the Old Testament. After all, we're not under law, we are under grace, we're the new covenant, not the old, so why do we need the Old Testament? And if we do not have a redemptive historic approach to the Bible, we do not see the Old Testament as Christian literature, why would we go to the Old Testament as opposed to just staying in the New?

We avoid it, even the best of us. We avoid it. But what does that have to do with the book of Revelation? Well, by one count, of 404 verses in Revelation divulge some 500 allusions to, you guessed it, the Old Testament. John alludes to nearly every book in the Old Testament Canon. Most of the references are from Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. By the way, if we're going to preach the Old Testament, generally what we're

going to do is we're going to preach Old Testament narrative or the Old Testament stories, right? Well, if we preach mainly Old Testament narrative and Old Testament stories just doing character studies, guess what we're not preaching? Psalms, Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and those are the books most referred to in the book of Revelation. So if you're not spending time in the Old Testament and you're especially not spending time in the Old Testament prophets, then you are going to miss much of what John is giving here as he gives us basically a commentary on Old Testament prophecy.

More of the Old Testament is referenced in Revelation than any other New Testament book. More than half of the references come from Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. More than half of the references in the book of Revelation, over 500 of them in the 404 verses, more than half of them come from Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. Daniel contains the most in proportion to its length. Daniel contains the most references in proportion to its length and most of the references from Daniel come from Daniel 7. And you see, you guys thought we were just making stuff up by preaching through the first six chapters of Daniel and then coming here to the first five chapters of Revelation and then going and doing Daniel 7 through the end before we come back and start tackling more of Revelation. That is strategic. We think about this stuff. Amen. It's very important. In terms of actual numbers of references, Isaiah ranks first.

So again, that makes it difficult for us. We have an aversion to the Old Testament, especially to the prophets and to the Psalms. Again, we'll read the Psalms but I'm talking about teaching through. When was last time you heard about anybody teaching through the Psalms? Just the sheer volume of the Psalms makes that a difficult undertaking. So the types of literature that we're least likely to be familiar with are the types of literature that are referenced in the book of Revelation.

Symbols make it difficult. Colors. We saw colors just here. If you look at what we read here in the first chapter, go with me down to verse 13, for example, "and in the midst of the lampstands," by the way, what color are the lampstands? Gold. "One like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace." So we see colors. Just here, all we did was read through the first chapter and we see gold, and we see white, and we see the color of fire, we see the color of burnished bronze. What do these things mean? You have to understand these things in order to understand the book of Revelation.

Animals: dragons and beasts and horses, oh my. What do these things mean? It makes it difficult.

Lampstands, what is it with these lampstands? He tells us. Let me give you an example where even here where we are told what it means, we're still not told completely what it means. Let me give you an example. Go down to verse 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." That's great. We know that the lampstands refer to the churches but we still don't know why lampstands, right? We've got to understand that as well.

So this is also a good time for an interpretive key. When you see these symbols, look for places where John tells you what things mean. That's always helpful. If he doesn't tell you what they mean, 9 times out of 10, you go back to the Old Testament to find out what they mean, and here we'd have to go back to Zechariah to understand that terminology, but we'll get to that.

Lampstands. Spirits. We read about seven spirits and we're going to find out later that that reference to seven spirits is a reference to the Spirit of God, to the Holy Spirit. Seven spirits? Why is that a reference to the Spirit? Okay, we'll get there but that's part of what makes it difficult.

Numbers. In addition to symbols, there are numbers that make this book difficult and there are numbers that are repeated throughout the book and they are very important. Sometimes we see the actual number, like here we see the number seven. The number seven appears twice in verse 4; it appears in verse 11; in verse 12; it appears again in verse 16; and then in verse 20 it appears six times. The number seven is rather important and you get that number here at the beginning of the book. But there are seven churches, seven spirits, seven golden lampstands, seven stars, seven seals, seven horns, seven eyes, seven angels, seven trumpets, seven thunders, seven crowns, seven heads, seven plagues, seven bowls, seven hills, seven kings, 7,000 killed because of the earthquake, seven Beatitudes. Seven is a number of completeness and it is, I would argue, the second most important number in the book of Revelation, that number seven. And the idea of completeness is important: this is about complete judgment; this is about complete victory; this is about complete glory; this is about complete praise. So that number is important.

What number is more important than seven? The number three which is a reference to the Triune God. Now, you might say we didn't see the number three as we read through chapter 1, but by my calculation we saw it 12 times. By the way, that's another important number. Well, but we'll get to that in a moment. And you say, "Wait a minute, I didn't see that number three anywhere." Okay. "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. Which He made known in which John bore witness to." There's three. By the way, we then see, "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, Blessed are those who hear, and blessed are those who keep what is written." Then we come down to verse 4, "John to the seven churches that are in Asia minor: Grace to you," from whom? 1. "Him who is and who was and who is to come." So you have a three on the first person of the Trinity. The second person of the Trinity is referenced here by the seven spirits. And then Jesus Christ, who is he? "The faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kingdoms of the earth." Again and again and again and again and again he references this number three. It is a reference to the Triune God. That number is important and we find it throughout the letter. By the way, we also see three referencing the dragon, the beast and the false prophet who are a counterfeit of the Triune God.

Another number that is important is the number four. The number four represents the earth or God's creation: the four corners, the four winds, four angels, four living creatures. In chapter 5, go to chapter 5 with me for a moment and look first at verse 9, "And they sang a new song, saying," so chapter 5, there is praise of God in heaven and there's a new song being sung, "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." What people? "From every tribe and language and people and nation." That is the election of God's complete people on the earth. Look at verse 13, "And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!'" Do you notice where these creatures are? Heaven, earth, under the earth, in the sea. Blessing, honor, glory, power. It's an important number. Sword, famine, disease, beast in 6:8. Peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, earthquake in 8:5 and in 16:18. Murders, witchcraft, fornication and thefts in 9:21. Peoples, nations, languages, kings in 10:11. Harps, musicians, flutes and trumpets, 18:22.

So we have the number three, the number four and the number seven. There is another number that is incredibly important in this book and that is the number 12, another number of completeness, the complete people of God: the 12 tribes; the 12 apostles; the 24 elders which is 12 and 12; the stars above the woman's head; the new Jerusalem has 12 foundations on which are the names of the 12 apostles; the tree of life at the end of the letter which is a restoration of the tree of life at the beginning of the Bible, there are how many different kinds of fruit? 12. The number 144,000, what is meant by that number 144,000? Is it a literal number? Absolutely not. No way in the world. What is it? $12 \times 12 \times 1000$. Now, you and I who live in this land have become jaded by numbers because we talk about like trillions of dollars in debt and stuff like that. Write the number trillion. Can you write that number? Most people can't even write the number trillion. You can't even think the number trillion in your head. You're just not wired to think about numbers that big, but think for a moment that you don't live in a culture that throws around monopoly money kind of numbers, 1,000 is a huge number so when you talk about $12 \times 12 \times 1000$, well, we know 12 is a number of the completeness of the people of God; 12×12 , the complete completeness of the people of God times 1,000, a massive number of the complete people of God. That's what's being said by the number 144,000.

There are several approaches to this book. One approach is the preterist approach. It literally means "that which has gone past." According to this view, everything recorded in the book of Revelation was fulfilled in the first century at the time John wrote the book. It's done. All of it is complete, which is why preterist and preterism is growing, has grown in popularity in the last few decades, that is why for preterists it is very important that you date the book of Revelation under the persecution of Nero and not under the persecution of Domitian. Traditionally, the book is dated under the persecution of Domitian, the last part of the decade of the 90s in the first century. But if you're a preterist and everything ends, especially in A.D. 70 with the destruction of the temple, then you've got to date this book early. The problem, of course, is that it makes it irrelevant to the rest of us throughout time.

There is the historicist approach. The Apocalypse according to the continuous historical approach presents a concise outline of the church's development from the day of Pentecost to the consummation. So the preterist says it's all done; it all took place; it is finished already. The historicist says that basically what you have in the seven letters to the seven churches is symbolically a letter to the church in each of its seven sort of dispensations, if you will, throughout history, and then the rest of the book has to be interpreted in light of that. So the question that the historicist would ask is: where do you think we are now in the book of Revelation? Some of you may have been asked that question before: where do you think we are now and what chapter do you think we are seeing fulfilled right now as we move forward toward the culmination?

There is the futurist approach which is perhaps the most common approach. The futurist approach is that most of the book beginning in chapter 4, verse 1, belongs to the future. Proponents stress the prophecies in the book that they say will be fulfilled just before, during and after Jesus returns to the earth which is why, by the way, in most places that preach the book of Revelation, all they preach is the first three chapters and you get through the letters to the churches and then you're pretty much done. The futurist approach says that from chapter 4, verse 1, on, all happens in the future. Now, there is a dispensational futurist approach which is the most common approach and that's the approach that says that basically after these letters to the churches, we're not talking to churches anymore because the church is raptured. The church is gone. Now, these are the things from chapter 4, verse 1, on that are happening after the church has been raptured. The futurist approach. Several difficulties, of course, with the futurist approach, not the least of which is that it makes everything after chapter 3 irrelevant to all but one generation of believers.

Then there is the idealist approach which interprets Revelation as a book of principles that contrasts the victorious Christ and his people with the defeated Satan and his underlings. The Apocalypse is not a history of events that have occurred in the past or a prophecy of events that will happen in the future necessarily, it is a book that fills God's people with comfort and motivation to endure to the end. Idealists stress the principle in the book, the principles in the book rather, so that its message is applicable to Christians of all generations. The key question there is: why should we have hope? The preterist, the key question there is: when did it happen? Most argue in A.D. 70. But historicists, the important question there is: where are we now in the process of this being unfolded? For the futurist, the question is: how close are we to chapter 4? For the idealist, the question is: how do we have hope? How do we have hope? That's what this book is about. How do we have hope?

There is also a fourth or fifth way, an eclectic or modified idealist approach which is the idealist approach that has the understanding that the book does give us a prophecy of what happens at the end of the age. The approach that we will take to this book is the idealist approach.

Then there, of course, is the eschatological question and the question of eschatological positions, and in many instances, quite frankly, people don't want to tackle the book of Revelation because we don't want to deal with eschatology. We don't want to divide people over eschatology because, after all, eschatology is unimportant, so they say. Folks, eschatology is extremely important. It determines how you read the Bible. It determines how you live your life. It determines how you view the future. It determines how you view the present. It's extremely important.

There are two basic approaches to eschatology as it relates to the book of Revelation. One approach says that when you get to chapter 19, you have the coming of Christ, and then in chapter 20, you have a millennium, and it is chronological order. Jesus comes and then you have a millennium. That would be a premillennial eschatology. Jesus comes and then you have a millennium. Now, you have classic premillennialism and dispensational premillennialism. In dispensational premillennialism, the key there is the rapture of the church before you have all of these things unfolding.

Then there are those who argue that because of recapitulation, and by that I mean what happens in the book of Revelation is that the same story is told again and again and again from different perspectives and vantage points. There was a movie not long ago, the movie was about one event that took place. There was an assassination attempt or something like that that took place, but what happened is the story was retold several times from the perspective of different characters. And so you get one perspective of a person who was there on the stage guarding the person where the assassination attempt happened; and then you have one from the perspective of a person who was in the audience and saw it happen; and then you have one from the perspective of an individual who was involved in the crime; and then you have one, and every time you went through, you learned a little something more about the story. That's what's happening in Revelation. Again and again and again, we see God's people under duress and Christ, the victorious King, coming to deal with and do away with sin, to vindicate his name, to save his people, and to establish and consummate his everlasting kingdom.

There are amillennialists and post-millennialists who view this the same way and see that what we have is a recapitulation between 19 and 20. Listen to this from Vern Poythress, "Revelation is clear. Why do so many people have trouble with it and why is it so controversial? We have trouble because we approach it from the wrong end. Suppose I start by asking, 'What do the bear's feet in Revelation 13:2 stand for?' If I start with a detail and ignore the big picture, I am asking for trouble. God is at the center of Revelation. You see that especially in chapters 4 and 5. We must start with him and with the contrast between him and his satanic opponents. If instead we try right away to puzzle out details, it is as if we tried to use a knife by grasping it by the blade instead of the handle. We are starting at the wrong end. Revelation is a picture book, not a puzzle book. Don't try to puzzle it out. Don't become preoccupied by isolated details, rather become engrossed in the story. Praise the Lord, cheer for the saints, detest the beast and long for final victory."

That's what this book is about. You don't have to understand all of the details. John is not trying to give you a puzzle book wherein you have to take the newspaper and a globe and a history book and a bunch of other stuff to try to figure out what this thing means. When he's talking about locusts, you don't have to go and find Apache helicopters. Amen. Do you see what I'm saying? When you hear hooves, think horses, not zebras. Some of y'all will get that on the way home. "What do you mean, think horses not zebras?" Well, when you hear hooves, most likely it's horses. It would be rare if you heard hooves and there was a bunch of zebras. You'd have to have more information to assume that it was zebras, amen? When we look at the book of Revelation, when you hear hooves, think horses, not zebras.

He's not trying to trick you, folks. That's not what the book of Revelation is about. It is about encouraging God's people in the midst of oppression and distress and despair and saying, "God will vindicate his name and his people. He will deal with sin. He will make all things right. His kingdom will be consummated and the end will come." That's what the letter is about. Keep that in mind and we'll be okay. "What does that part of the thing mean?" I'm really not sure but Jesus is coming and we win. Amen.

Let me give you an outline of the book. I'm indebted to Derek Thomas for this. Chapters 1 through 3, in chapters 1 through 3, we get an introduction, letters to seven churches. By the way, there are more than seven churches in Asia minor at this point, but the letters are only to seven churches. For example, we know that Hierapolis and Colossae are there. We don't get letters to them. Why? Because of the number seven. That's what's important. By the way, these seven churches are in the form of a circle. Whilst the recipients of these letters were real churches at the time John wrote, the number seven probably means however that we are meant to take these letters as coming from the Savior to the church in every age. They are letters from a Senior Pastor of the church, amen?

After that, we turn the corner and we get to chapters 4 and 5. That's the second section and it's not like what we find in chapters 1 through 3. What we find in chapters 1 through 3 is very different. It's very much like an ordinary epistle but we get to chapter 4 and we're in heaven before the throne and things look way different. These chapters picture the throne of God and the scroll which only the Lion/Lamb is able to open. It affirms the sovereignty of Christ which is the theme of the book.

Then we go chapters 6 through 7. Here we get the seven seals and judgment, the consequences of opening the book by the Lion/Lamb. Each seal represents issues and circumstances common to every age. That's important. Each seal represents issues and circumstances common to every age. No details of particular wars or rulers are intended. Let me say that again: no details of particular wars or rulers are intended. One more time: no details of particular wars or rulers are intended. It's symbolic. It's timeless.

Chapters 8 through 11, here we unfold the sounding of the trumpets, the last of which announces the coming of the kingdom of God and Christ, the last judgment, the opening of the temple of God. These parallel the judgments announced in the seven seals.

Chapters 12 through 14, very different. The scene changes almost completely. It does not flow out of the previous sections. You don't see an obvious continuity between chapter 11 and chapter 12. He's telling the story again from an entirely different vantage point. We see the male child, the Christ, pursued by a dragon, the devil. It's a narrative, the great antithesis between the city of God and the city of this world. The devil enlists the help of two beasts. In this conflict, however, the elect are saved and the city of Babylon falls. God's enemies are overcome, amen?

Chapters 15 to 16. Seven angels now appear with seven bowls containing judgment and plagues, the last great earthquake and Babylon is destroyed. But Babylon has already been destroyed earlier in chapter 14, right? Yup. Now we're telling it again. Are you beginning to see that pattern?

Chapters 17 through 19, the destruction of Babylon, the beast and the false prophet.

Then chapters 20 through 22, God's dealing with the dragon and the final judgment in the lake of burning sulfur. The final city of God, the new heavens, new earth, new Jerusalem in which eternal fellowship with God is to be enjoyed. That's the outline of this book.

But what do we take from this book? I find it only fitting that I give you seven things. 1. The glory of the Triune God. The book of Revelation is about the glory of the Triune God: the glory of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I just find it providential that God allowed me to be embroiled in a controversy surrounding whether or not the Trinity is important earlier this year and now here we are in the book of Revelation where I am more sure than I have ever been before in my life that this is a cardinal doctrine, the cardinal doctrine. God has revealed himself as the Triune God of the universe who has eternally existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and who glorifies himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and in this book we see again and again and again the glory of the Triune God. That's important here.

Secondly, the relevance and reliability of the whole Bible. The relevance and reliability of the whole Bible. I think it's a travesty that we stay away from the book of Revelation. I've been scared of the book of Revelation. There it is. I've been scared of the book of Revelation because for the most part, my training has always been from a dispensational premillennial futurist approach to the book of Revelation. I can't teach it that way because I don't see it. The idealist approach absolutely, absolutely. We see the Old Testament in the New. We see the continuity between the covenants, between the Testaments and the discontinuity.

Thirdly, we see the sovereignty of God. We see the sovereignty of God. If you don't get anything else out of the book of Revelation, see the sovereignty of God. How does God give us a book about the way the world ends as we know it? He does that because he is the sovereign God of the universe. That's how. He is able to say again and again and again, "My people will be oppressed and I will deliver them." How can he say that? Because he is the sovereign God of the universe. He can say that this is how history works itself out and again and again and again we see it, but ultimately know this: no

matter how many times you see it, no matter how many ways you see it, that's not the way things end. "I am sovereign. I will be vindicated. My people will be vindicated and my kingdom will be consummated."

4. We see the reality of suffering. We see the reality of suffering. You know, one of the reasons people don't like the book of Revelation is because of the pictures of death and blood and violence. It's real stuff. Streets filled with blood. It's there. Sin is real. Suffering is real. Martyrdom is throughout this letter. Martyrdom is real. People die for the cause of Christ. Our adversary is real. His war against the church is real. His hatred of God and the people of God is real and we do not get raptured out of here so that we don't get to taste it. I believe for most people that just makes sense. That just makes sense. If God is going to rapture the church out of here so that we don't taste tribulation, didn't he kinda forget John and the boys? Amen somebody. What about our brothers and sisters in China right now? Can we really say to them with a straight face, "Don't worry. Before it gets really bad, he's going to rapture us out." "For real? Do you know how we have to live right now?" No, suffering is real and it is real for the people of God and, in fact, in many instances the people of God suffer worse than others do because they are the people of God.

But we also see the inevitability and severity of God's judgment. The inevitability and severity of God's judgment. Folks, my favorite picture of Jesus is in this book right here, Revelation 11. You can have the sissified Jesus with the hair like a shampoo model, hands that never worked in his daddy's carpenter's shop, features that look almost like a girl, a European girl who was never a Jew a day in her life, meek and wimpy with the lamb across his shoulders. You can have that guy. Revelation 19, beginning in verse 11, "Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire." Does this sound familiar? "And on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords." That's Jesus. He will punish the wicked and that includes you unless you repent.

6. The certainty of Christ's return. We see the certainty of Christ's return. Christ will return. We just read about it. He's coming. Christ will return. This is important in light of the reality of suffering, is it not? Christ will return. Even if he doesn't, even if he doesn't, there is a word here of martyrs who are crying out, "How long?" They will be vindicated. Christ will return. Do you believe that, saints?

Finally, the consummation of redemptive history. The consummation of redemptive history. I love how in Revelation 22 we go back to Genesis 2. It is a beautiful picture. In Genesis 3, we have the fall. In Genesis 3:15, God gives us a promise, the Gospel, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring;

he will bruise his heel, but he will crush your head." That's chapter 3 of Genesis. Chapter 2, everything is perfect. Chapter 3, there is a fall and God declares war. In the book of Revelation, we see the war. We see the seed of the woman there in chapter 12 which the dragon wants to devour but he cannot, and then we see the serpent crushed and done away with and we go back to a place where there is a tree in the garden and the rivers. It's the consummation of all of history. It's the restoration of all things.

Listen to this from Kim Riddlebarger. "The book of Revelation clearly reminds us that God is sovereign over all human history and that he will do as he said he will do, turn human sin and suffering into good. Thus the redemptive story takes us from creation to the fall to redemption to a new creation. God not only will save his people, he will save all of creation."

How dare we not read this book? How dare we not preach this book? This book makes much of the Triune God. It makes much of the Father. It makes much of the Son. It makes much of the Spirit. This book gives much hope to the church and especially to those who suffer. This book makes much of sin and of the justice and judgment of God that will come against sin. This book makes much of the consummation of all things at the end of the age. We are living and waiting for a city whose builder and maker is God and in this book we get to see the city. Symbolically, yes, but how else could we understand, take in or even appreciate such a thing?

This is our journey over the next several months. We will walk through these first five chapters and I can promise you this, I can promise you this: when we have preached through the first five chapters of the book of Revelation, your attitude will not be, "I don't understand," your attitude will be, "Do we have to leave? Do we have to leave?" And many of the sermons are going to sound similar, making much of Christ. Worship the Lamb. Bow before the Lamb. Every tribe and kindred and tongue and nation, make much of him. Worship him. Who is worthy? He is worthy. There is none other who is worthy. Boy, after several months of that, you're not going to want to go anywhere but that's okay. It's okay because after several months of that, we're going to go back to Daniel, start in chapter 11 and Daniel is going to give us an interpretive key so that we can understand this book even better and make even more of the Lamb.

Finally, a word to those who are in a bad position to go through this journey. If you are here and you have not come to God through repentance of your sin and faith in what he has done through the person and work of Jesus Christ, this will not be a pleasant journey for you. First of all, we will make much of the God whom you do not know. Secondly, we will show you a dreadful picture of what lies ahead for you lest you turn from your sin and kiss the Son and worship him and grant to him the worship that he is due. If you are not among those who have bowed the knee to Christ, there is a very disturbing picture of what lies ahead for you and my admonition to you is as it will be throughout this letter: repent, turn from your sin, turn to Christ, embrace him, believe in him, worship him, trust him alone.

Finally, I'm not going to say if, but the fact of the matter is we know many people, all of us know many people who don't know God and think they do, or who don't know God and know they don't, and here's what's very interesting: there are a lot of people who won't come to church but they love to be there if you're teaching through Revelation. Bring them early and often. Bring them. This is an incredibly evangelistic book. Do you know people who are suffering? Bring them. Bring them. This is a letter for those who suffer. Do you know people who have a hard time finding hope? Bring them. This is the book for those who have a hard time finding hope. In fact, just come and bring everybody you know because we all need this and there is no better place to find it. There is a reason this is the last book in the Bible because, quite frankly folks, it doesn't get any better than this.

Let's pray.