

REVELATION – SERMON 1

THE UNVEILING OF THE BOOK

Revelation 1:1-3

INTRODUCTION

- People are desperate to know what the future holds.
- Yet God has shown us what will happen in the future, in the Book of Revelation
- Many have avoided this book, deeming it too difficult to understand or interpret.
- John Calvin wrote commentaries for every other book of the Bible, yet did not write one for Revelation.
- Martin Luther questioned its authenticity and whether it should even be in the Bible, saying “Christ is neither taught nor known in it.”
- Some have a misguided fascination with Revelation, obsessing over minor points, while missing the greater message of Christ and His kingdom.
- Revelation fittingly concludes and completes the canon of Scripture
- It gathers themes from the whole Bible and brings them into focus in its pages.
- Genesis and Revelation serve as two book ends that hold the Bible together:
 - ✓ In Genesis the earth was created; in Revelation the earth passes away.
 - ✓ In Genesis was Satan’s first rebellion; in Revelation is Satan’s last rebellion.
 - ✓ In Genesis the sun, moon, and stars were for earth’s government; in Revelation these same heavenly bodies are for earth’s judgment.
 - ✓ In Genesis the sun was to govern the day; in Revelation there is no need of the sun.

- ✓ In Genesis darkness was called night; in Revelation there is “no night” (see Rev. 21:25; 22:5).
 - ✓ In Genesis the waters were called seas; in Revelation there is no more sea.
 - ✓ In Genesis was the entrance of sin; in Revelation is the exodus of sin.
 - ✓ In Genesis the curse was pronounced; in Revelation the curse is removed.
 - ✓ In Genesis death entered; in Revelation there is no more death.
 - ✓ In Genesis was the beginning of sorrow and suffering; in Revelation there is no more sorrow or tears.
 - ✓ In Genesis was the marriage of the first Adam; in Revelation is the marriage of the Last Adam.
 - ✓ In Genesis is the temporary reign of the first Adam; in Revelation the eternal reign of the second Adam.
 - ✓ In Genesis we saw man’s city, Babylon, being built; in Revelation we see man’s city, Babylon, destroyed, and God’s city, the New Jerusalem, brought into view.
 - ✓ In Genesis Satan’s doom was pronounced; in Revelation Satan’s doom is executed. (J. Vernon McGee)
- The Bible is a book of progressive revelation – from the earlier books to the latter, there is progressively more light given.
 - The Book of Revelation is the climax of God’s written revelation, building upon previously revealed truth in Scripture, expounding, complimenting, and shedding more light on what was formerly given.
 - There are no direct quotes from the Old Testament, yet it has been calculated that out of its 404 verses, 275 have some reference to Old Testament Scripture
 - There are also many parallels between Revelation and Christ’s teaching in the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24-25

I. THE PURPOSE OF THE APOCALYPSE

A. It is a book that reveals

1. Revelation is the Greek word *apocalupsis*

2. This word is used 18 times in the NT and is translated as “appearing, coming, lighten, manifestation, be revealed, revelation”
3. Contrary to how many people treat this book, it not sealed, it is unveiled for us (Revelation 22:10; cf. Daniel 12:9)
4. The doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture asserts that the Bible is clear and is able to be understood by anyone who will truly study it with a right heart.

B. What does it reveal?

1. It is a revelation of “things”
2. Things that must “shortly come to pass” (Revelation 22:6)
 - a. Shortly – *tachei* – quickly, speedily
 - b. There is a sense of imminence and urgency to the prophecy – “the time is at hand”
3. But foremost, it is a revelation of Jesus Christ
4. From beginning to end, it unveils the Lord Jesus Christ, and we see His glory and power with a lucidity that no other book of Scripture comes close to.
5. Revelation may be regarded as the sequel to the Gospel of John.
 - a. The Gospel relates the details and events of Christ’s first advent
 - b. Revelation relates the details and events of Christ’s second advent

C. It is God’s revelation to His servants

1. Servant – *doulos* = bondsman
2. Revelation is not a message to all mankind

3. It is not a message to those who merely call themselves Christians
 4. It is to the servants of God
- D. It was penned by the apostle John (1:1,4,9; 21:2; 22:8)
1. Domitian, Emperor of Rome (81-96 AD), demanded all people worship him as God
 2. John refused and was exiled to the Island of Patmos (1:9), a barren island in the Aegean Sea
 3. His exile ended upon the accession of Nerva in 96 AD
 4. It is thought that Revelation was written around 95 AD
- E. John received this prophecy through the Lord's angel (1:1; 22:6,16)

II. THE PROCEDURE FOR APPREHENSION

- A. There have been many approaches to this book:
1. Idealist
 - a. This treats the book as an allegory, teaching the ideal of the triumph of good over evil
 - b. In this view, Antichrist is evil personified, not a real person
 - c. Advocates are usually liberal in their theology
 - d. Held by postmillennialists and amillennialists
 2. Preterist
 - a. From the Latin word *preater*, meaning "past,"

- b. Sees all of Revelation as being fulfilled in the past, during the events in the early history of the church
- c. Antichrist is identified as a past Roman emperor, but they disagree over which one
- d. Held by postmillennialists and amillennialists

3. Historicist

- a. This sees Revelation being fulfilled through the whole history of the church
- b. Antichrist is seen as one of the medieval popes, or more broadly as the papal office
- c. Held by postmillennialists and amillennialists

4. Futurist

- a. Sees Revelation as describing mainly events in the eschatological future, particularly chapters 4-22
- b. Antichrist is a real person who will appear in the future
- c. It is the only position that interprets the book in a literal manner
- d. The main objection is the “improbability”, in the view of critics, of these events occurring
- e. Held by premillennialists

B. We should interpret Bible prophecy literally

- 1. All fulfilled prophecy has been fulfilled literally
- 2. Early Christians interpreted prophecy literally

“The most striking point in the eschatology of the ante-Nicene age [before 325 AD] is the prominent chiliasm, or millenarianism, that is the belief of a visible reign of Christ in

glory on earth with the risen saints for a thousand years, before the general resurrection and judgment.” (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 1884, II, p. 614).

3. If prophecy does not mean exactly what it says, there is no way to know exactly what it does mean.
 - a. Allegorical interpretation allows its adherents to force any idea they like upon the text
 - b. SDAs teach that the mark of the beast is Sunday worship
 - c. Jamieson, Fausset, Brown on Revelation 20:2: “Thousand symbolizes that the world is perfectly leavened and pervaded by the divine; since thousand is ten, the number of the world, raised to the third power, three being the number of God.”
- C. The Bible does contain figurative language and symbolism, but these are identifiable and can be interpreted by the immediate and broader context
- D. Revelation uses symbolism
 1. Christ “signified” the prophecy to John (1:1)
 2. Symbolic language is a powerful linguistic tool that paints a vivid picture (eg. Antichrist is described as a “beast”)
 3. Symbolic language endures through all ages
 4. Symbolic language, like the parables, is hidden from unbelievers, but is open to those with ears to hear and eyes to see
 5. All the symbols in Revelation are explained in this book or elsewhere in the Bible
- E. Revelation’s outline (1:19)
 1. The things which thou hast seen (1)

2. The things which are (2-3)
3. The things which shall be hereafter (4-22)

III. THE PROMISE TO THE ATTENTIVE

A. The uniqueness of the blessing

1. No other book of the Bible pronounces a special blessing on those who read it
2. It shows that the book *is* readable and understandable, and should not be avoided as many Christians do
3. There are seven blessings or beatitudes pronounced in Revelation (1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, 22:14)

B. The requirements for the blessing

1. It is to be read – note the importance of regular Bible reading
2. It is to be heard – this is a reference to the public reading of Scripture in the church (cf. Nehemiah 8:3)
3. It is to be kept – simply hearing the word is not enough; we must obey what we read and hear (Matthew 7:24-27; John 7:17; James 1:25)

C. The nature of the blessing

1. The blessing of the knowledge of God's providential hand in the events of the world and our lives
2. The blessing of a deeper knowledge and love of Jesus Christ
3. The blessing of fixing our hearts and lives on eternal things
 - a. This promotes purity (2 Peter 3:10-12; 1 John 3:2-3)

- b. This promotes prayer (Matthew 6:10)
4. The blessing of joy in the midst of suffering
 - a. When we read this book, we are not told that we are exempt from suffering, but that the suffering we face is for our good, and is temporary (Romans 8:18)
 - b. Instead of forming our theology from our circumstances, we are to form it from the objective truth of God's word.
 - c. A recurring description of the Christian in Revelation is "him that overcometh" (2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21; 12:11; 21:7)
 5. The blessing of provoking us preach the Gospel to the lost

CONCLUSION

"The time is at hand", therefore:

1. *"Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light" (Romans 13:11-13)*
2. *"Let your moderation be known unto all men."* (Philippians 4:5)
3. *"Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts" (James 5:8)*
4. *"Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer" (1 Peter 4:7)*