

Look! Listen! - And Overcome!

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

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Look! Listen! – And Overcome!
(Introduction to the Revelation of Jesus Christ)

Lord's Day Morning

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Introduction

NKJ Revelation 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants -- things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John, 2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. 3 Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time *is* near.

4 John, to the seven churches which 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 from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, 6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

7 Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.

The big thing is that we know the truth. But the truth is not easy to know – not simple to see. Bacteria and viruses are very, very small. Until microscopes enabled us to see them, we could not know the truth about disease. So much of what we *see* is the effect of something behind it – often something so small and hidden that it is virtually invisible to the eye. The living cell is microscopic, yet what hope of finding a cure for cancer do we have until we can see and know the things that go on in the cell, and even in the various parts and organs of

the cell, and then to the very molecular level?

And so it is as well in the ethical realms of life. Think, for instance, of *justice* – real, perfect *justice*. What is required? Perfect *sight*. Perfect *knowledge*. Because behind the observed events that bring a matter before the judge, lie intricate, hidden motives and thoughts and actions. Secrets. And then to muddy the waters further, men *lie and deceive*. They swear to tell the whole truth, but they do not. So, perfect justice is a rarity in this life. What justice we *do* enjoy comes only when what is unseen is brought to light and understood. This is what the Psalmist wrote of so long ago –

NKJ Psalm 73:2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped. 3 For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Only when he learned what was *really true* of their situation did he begin to think rightly once more –

NKJ Psalm 73:16 When I thought *how* to understand this, It was too painful for me -- 17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; *Then* I understood their end. 18 Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction.

19 Oh, how they are *brought* to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors.

And so we may say – *in this present life of sense and men and the earth and time – very little is as it appears to be.*

Even that which men laud as wisdom, turns out to be *foolishness* –

NKJ 1 Corinthians 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Do you begin to see? That man, that totalitarian government, that Islamic religion, may appear to be the real enemy, but it turns out otherwise –

NKJ Ephesians 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

Let's say it again –

"...*in this present life very little is as it appears to be.*"

What We See is Real

Now, lest someone take off at this point on some philosophical denial of all reality, let's be careful to speak with clarity. We are not denying that this created order is *real*. It surely is. The earth, animals, trees and mountains, ME – it is all real. What I sense and experience is not just some cosmic prank being played upon my mind so that in the end it turns out I am just a brain in a lab jar being prodded to imagine it all. You have no doubt read novels or seen movies built off of that kind of thinking (*The 12 Monkeys; The Matrix; etc*).

But what we are asserting is the very thing the Scriptures assert. Namely, that behind this created order lies an unseen, spiritual order that is, more foundational than what we see, feel, smell, hear, and touch. And until we come to know some things about that invisible order, we simply cannot rightly understand nor explain ourselves, our lives, and the things we see in this temporal world.

- There is a reason I get sick or that all human beings die – a reason that is even more fundamental than the virus.
- There is a reason for the war in Iraq, a reason more fundamental than money or power or the protection of our nation.

- There is a reason why the world hates the Christian, and that reason is more fundamental than a conflict between differing value systems.

"...in this present life very little is as it appears to be."

What Do We Need Then?

Therefore, if we are ever to rightly understand the things we see and experience – the events we read about in the newspapers, the fact that those people next door simply will *not* listen to me tell them about Christ – we need help. Somehow, we must be enabled to see behind the scenes. To peer into that *other order* which lies back of rocks and trees and fish and wars and volcanoes and crime and noble acts and children who are selfish. We need, well –

An Apocalypse

You have heard this word used in a number of different nuances. Often, "The Apocalypse" is meant to refer to the end of the world – probably because that event is found in the book we are about to study. *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* talks about the end of the world, and the Greek word used for revelation is this very word – *apocalypse* (or, more properly in Greek, *apokalupsis*). So, when someone wants to describe an event so

staggering, so earth-shaking that it is almost other-worldly and unbelievable, they might use this adjective *apocalyptic*. In that sense the word is almost synonymous with surreal.

However, the primary meaning of *apokalupsis* is this –

"revelation; something being unveiled that had before been hidden from view."

You can see this, for example, in some other New Testament usages of the word –

NKJ Romans 16:25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began

NKJ Ephesians 3:3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already,

It turns out then that the Bible provides us with the very thing we have said that we need – *an unveiling of that which lies behind and unseen*. Its first words are a perfect example –

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

How would we have any knowledge of such a thing apart from *revelation*? The Bible draws the curtain back, you see. Or, consider this – that mystery that the Apostle Paul is talking about – how did we come to know it? By revelation; by an unveiling effected for us by God Himself. This is the thing the author of Hebrews meant –

NKJ Hebrews 1:1 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by *His Son*, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;

By His Son. The Lord Jesus Christ HIMSELF is revelation. He is, the Word of God –

NKJ John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

No man would ever have come to know of this great salvation in Christ if it were not for apocalypse. Revelation.

NOTE: Revelation entails more than the mere communication of words and data. It entails *the blind receiving sight and the deaf being given ears to hear*. Apart from such a mighty work

of God upon us, we would still not see behind the veil. This is why there may even be someone here this morning who is still trusting in their own righteousness rather than in the righteousness of Christ. To man's natural eyes and mind such a thing makes perfect sense. Such was the Jews' problem when they absolutely missed the real spiritual nature of the Law –

NKJ 2 Corinthians 3:15 But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. 16 Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

The veil is taken away, you see – *apocalypse, unveiling, revelation*. So that a Pharisee like Nicodemus, for the first time, begins to really see and hear Moses. Because for the first time he begins to see and hear *Christ* in the Law.

CAUTION: Listen very carefully – *if you are operating on the notion that your own good works will (even in part) justify you before God, here is certain proof that a veil lies on your heart so that you cannot see and understand what God has revealed in Christ*. And you are in a dangerous, lost condition. Turn to Christ and plead with Him to take that veil away.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Alright then, the entire Bible is God's *apocalypse*. His revelation. But now we come to a book, the very title of which is –

Apokalupsis Iesou Christou, The Revelation of Jesus Christ

It begins with *unveiling words* –

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants-"

Here is a book from the Lord Jesus Christ which was given to Him by His Father *to show, to make known, to reveal* to us. And at its very heart, this book then is an unveiling. It is our Lord pulling back the curtain so that we might see into that spiritual realm which lies back of this temporal one. And so vital is it for us to see these things He shows us, a special blessing is pronounced –

NKJ Revelation 1:3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

And you have the same repeated at the close of the book –

NKJ Revelation 22:7b Blessed is he who keep the words of the prophecy of this book.

This book is our Lord Jesus Christ coming to us and saying in effect –

"Come here. I have something to show you. Something that is vital for you to see."

Seeing/Hearing and Overcoming

In fact, so crucial is it that we see these things revealed, seeing and hearing is repeatedly connected in this book with overcoming. With victory over our real enemies. With ability to persevere to the end.

NKJ Revelation 2:7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." '

NKJ Revelation 2:11 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." '

NKJ Revelation 3:5 "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 6 "He who has an ear, let him hear

what the Spirit says to the churches." '

NKJ Revelation 21:5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." 6 And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. 7 "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. 8 "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Understand? This book is the Lord Jesus Christ *unveiling/revealing* to us things that are vital for us to know *if we are to overcome*. And it is necessary because – remember?

"...in this present life very little is as it appears to be."

If we are to emerge from the present conflict as overcomers, rather than ones who are overcome by the world, the flesh, and the devil, then we need to know the truth. We need to know

and see *what is really going on here*. We need to know things like this –

- That old man exiled to the Isle of Patmos is more important to Christ than Caesar,
- That small, apparently weak, impoverished church at Smyrna is really rich,
- That comfortable church at Laodicea in all her wealth is in reality *nauseating* to Christ,
- There is a mighty throne room in heaven ruling over this universe, a King over kings,
- That the affairs and events of this world – the wars, the famines, the ruling powers – all are part of the perfect decree of God,
- That though the faithful Christian be hated by this world and even killed, he will never be lost and in fact will reign with Christ,
- That when hurtful things come to us, it is all part of the Plan – be patient just a little longer,
- That the Day approaches. All enemies of Christ will be destroyed fully and finally. There will be a New heavens and a New earth where there will never again be crying or pain or death or any hurtful thing.
- That, above all, *the Lamb is a Lion!* *And He has conquered.*

See, Hear, and Overcome! "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." (4:1b)

Understand now? This is the theme and purpose of this book.

A Letter to a Church at War

Dr. Dennis Johnson is a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in California. He has recently written a commentary on Revelation called The Triumph of the Lamb. In the opening pages, he sets out certain facts about Revelation which are necessary for us to grasp if we are to really get its message. One of these points is this –

"Revelation is for a Church under Attack."

Listen further –

"Revelation is addressed to a church that is under attack. Its purpose, to reveal 'things which must soon take place,' is not to satisfy idle eschatological curiosity or feed a hunger for revenge, but to fortify Jesus' followers in steadfast hope and holy living. The seven beatitudes that punctuate the narrative promise God's blessing on those who keep Christ's word (Rev 1:3; 22:7) even upon pain of death (14:13), who maintain purity in alert expectation of Christ's return (16:15), who are invited to the Lamb's

wedding feast (19:9), who have been beheaded for their faith and so share in the first resurrection (20:4-6), and share in the tree of life in the city of God (22:14). In these blessings we hear hints of the various forms of attack being launched against the church: persecution leading to martyrdom and seduction leading to defilement."

"The church's struggle is also reflected in the promises made to the victor, the overcomer. Each letter to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 closes with a promise 'to him to overcomes.'"

"The church's ultimate enemy, the dragon...manifests the massive cunning symbolized in his seven heads (12:3) by attacking the church from within and without, through physical threat, spiritual deception, and material seduction."

"In response to these attacks, those who hold to 'the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus' are called to endure and to stay pure. Because the enemy attacks ruthlessly, employing the intimidating force of Rome's armies and, by implication, the politico-military muscle of Rome's lesser successors, the people of Jesus must steel their hearts to endure persecution in persistent hope."

Revelation is, as Johnson very correctly tells us, for a church under attack. And therefore, incidentally, the interpretation of Revelation must always be guided by this purpose. If we study Revelation, learn all the various theories, make point and counterpoint, but fail to see behind the curtain, to see that WE are under incessant attack by a spiritual enemy and his kingdom, then we have missed it. And we will be in danger of being overcome rather than being overcomers.

In other words, if we are not brought face-to-face with the fact that in this world the Christian will have tribulation, suffering, and persecution to the point of being required to yield our very lives, and yet in it all we can be of good cheer because Christ has overcome the world, *then we have missed it*. And I am afraid that many have and continue to *miss it*. Listen to Johnson once more –

"If we could explain every phrase, identify every allusion to Old Testament Scripture or Greco-Roman society, trace every interconnection, and illumine every mystery in this book and yet were silenced by the intimidation of public opinion, terrorized by the prospect of suffering, enticed by affluent Western culture's promise of 'security, comfort, and pleasure,' then we would not have

begun to understand the Book of Revelation and God wants us to...Always, in every age and place, the church is under attack. Our only safety lies in seeing the ugly hostility of the enemy clearly and clinging fast to our Champion and King, Jesus."

And this is why I concluded that we are at an appropriate time to enter into a detailed study of the book of Revelation. We have been studying eschatology in our Bible studies so that a concurrent study of Revelation will be a perfect complement. But we have also been studying this matter of *suffering and persecution* –

NKJ 2 Timothy 3:12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

To whatever degree your thoughts have been that the book of Revelation is simply about what is going to happen, fodder for wild speculation and really not worth studying because who can understand it after all - to this degree I trust your thoughts will be changed forever.

THIS is what this book is telling us, THIS is why there is a special blessing pronounced upon us as we enter into this study –

NKJ John 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

And therefore, WE can be overcomers in Him.

Look, then. Listen. And overcome.