

Revelation 1: 1-3, 4, 9; “Blessed is he who Reads”,
Sermon # 1 in a series entitled - “The Faithful and True
Witness”, Delivered on November 13th, 2005
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The Book of Revelation is often thought of by Christians as a very mysterious book, perhaps the hardest book in all the Bible to understand. This is because its symbols and word pictures and numbers are so difficult to understand, that many people do not read it because they cannot make sense out of it. It is frustratingly unclear to them. But verse 3 which I just read to you says, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it.” And so if there is a blessing in it for those who read it and hear it and keep it; and there is; it must be of great benefit to Christ’s church in all the generations from when it was written, to our own day, and beyond. The book is a book of prophecy, to be sure, and there is much controversy over the various views of how the prophetic part of the book should be understood. And when we get to Chapter 6 I will attempt to give you an overview of the various views of prophecy held by Christians. But the importance of this book to us, does not consist primarily in understanding all the details of what has happened in the past, or where we are now in relation to Christ’s return or the Millennium, but in our being good witnesses to the truth even as John was on the isle of Patmos.

What I see as the theme of this great final book of the Bible can be found in Revelation 3: 14. There Jesus Christ calls himself the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness.” This book was given by the Lord Jesus to His Church so that she would be able to bear her testimony for righteousness and truth; that understanding the kind of opposition that she would receive, she would be able to faithfully persevere in her witness to her Lord and know that His cause and kingdom would triumph. So the question that I am asking this afternoon is this. What kind of a revelation does this book bring to us? And as we look closely at these first three verses we see that it is a vision of 4 things which are given to us in these verses.

1st- It is a vision of Christ Himself

2nd- It is a vision of how the Church has and can serve Christ.

3rdly- It is a vision giving Christ’s people a general overview of

Church History

And 4th- It is a vision intended to bless everyone who will be obedient to the exhortations found in it.

1st - It is a vision of Christ Himself.

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. He ascended up from the Mount of Olives after He had shown Himself alive to His apostles and disciples for 40 days, and He is even now seated at the right hand of God the Father. A little later in the 1st chapter we will see that since His ascension, He has assumed His Righteous rule over all the kingdoms of the earth. In Matthew 28: 18, after His resurrection He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me." In John 5: 22, 23 He says, "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father." This is all part of the Father's plan, that all things should be submitted to His Son, ever since the Lord Jesus Christ purchased with His life and His blood a kingdom of men. This revelation God the Father gave to God the Son to show His servants. It is a mediatorial kingdom. Turn with me to Daniel 7: 9-14. Here we find a vision of the four major earthly kingdoms which came before Christ appeared. And then we see a vision of God the Father in verses 9 and 10, pictured as the Ancient of Days seated on a throne, a picture of purity, ruling in His glory, who is the great judge and King over everything in heaven and earth. And we see One in verse 13, "like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven, brought near to the Ancient of Days, and to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall never be destroyed." He has been given an everlasting kingdom, and this book of Revelation is given to him by God the Father to give to us, His Church, because it relates directly to the outworking of the Father's plan to have a people from in every generation; from every tribe tongue, people, and nation. God wants to show us in this book more about what His Son is like since He has ascended; His power, His authority, His glory, His grace and His righteous judgment. Revelation in the greek is Apokalypsis. Sometimes this book is called the Apocalypse. The word means an unveiling, an uncovering, or a revealing. It uncovers the truth of the power and glory of Jesus Christ and the advancement of His kingdom upon the earth.

2. 2ndly- It is a vision to show Christ's servants how to serve Him.

This book was given by God the Father to God the Son “to show His servants - things which must shortly take place.” John was the first servant of Christ shown these things. But it is very fitting that the Apostle John be the one who was shown them first. John was the closest disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was the one who, when the disciples reclined at the Lord's Supper, is described as laying his head on Christ's breast. He is called, “His servant John” in verse 1. I am of the opinion that this book was written late in John's life, and late in the first century, perhaps 96 A.D. John appears to have been the last living Apostle of our Lord. A servant is one who follows his master around and attends upon him to keep his commandments. He does all that the Master asks him to do. He stays in his Master's service until he is released. You remember the conversation between Peter and our Lord about John. Jesus had just finished telling Peter, in John 21: 19 about how he would glorify Him in his death. And Peter it says, turned around, and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, and he said, “But Lord, what about this man?” And Jesus said to him, If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.” And Peter was martyred in about 67 A.D. under Nero's reign. But John lived all the way through the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and 28 years longer. This was time of great service for John. “A disciple is not above his teacher nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master,” Jesus says in Matthew 10: 24, and 25. The way to serve the Lord is the way that John served the Lord. It is by submitting to God's providential ordering of events in our lives as we proclaim in every way that we can, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. It is to keep God's commandments and hold fast the truth of His word even if it leads us into tribulation. Verse 9 says, “I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.” John's primary service to Christ was, as an Apostle, to preach His Word and build up and strengthen disciples, spreading the gospel and building up the Lord's people. But all this kind of service involves suffering. Because John was making progress in preaching these things, no doubt people were turning from the worship of idols and coming to see that Domitian the Emperor was

not to be worshipped.

Something like this led to John's banishment to the Isle of Patmos. But even there he found useful service. And in writing to the seven churches of Asia, John reminds them that he is their brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus. This book is a vision of how Christians serve Christ. They serve him by being brotherly toward other Christians, realizing that in the world there is tribulation. Tribulation should not be found between brethren in the church, but tribulation will be found coming to the church. To serve Christ together we must realize that we who believe are part of his kingdom and we are companions in it together. The Christian life is a life of trials and afflictions, and there is a great need for patience in facing them which only comes through Jesus Christ. This patience is a fruit of the Spirit's working in our lives and we are able bear up under the trials and persecutions that come when we live by the Word of God and proclaim Jesus as the only way of salvation. This book is given to show us that this serving Christ in this way is the way that the truth of the gospel makes headway against Satan's kingdom and the world. John was alone and isolated but He still had Christ. He still served His master.

3. 3rdly- This book of the Revelation is a vision giving believers a general overview of Church History.

It says in verse 1, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants - things which must shortly take place." And in verse 3 it says, "Blessed is he who reads....for the time is near." I am sure that every generation since this prophecy was written down has had some Christians in it, thinking that theirs was the generation that Christ would return. And God has designed the book this way. So that we would always be looking for his return. But his coming to them in their physical death is what they actually saw and needed to prepare for. That is the coming that all generations, so far, have found real. Christ comes in judgment to societies like Rome and Jerusalem. Christ is opposed by the systems of evil raised up by Satan and the strategies of evil men devised against His kingdom. But here in this book we see that whatever war is waged by the evil one, that Christ's kingdom will still eventually prevail. This book, as we shall see in its prophetic chapters, tells us that story in an overview, and it has been given to the church in every generation since John's so that people would know what the strategy and deception is; without others who are malicious to God's people being

able to understand that Christians really do know what to expect and to do in relation to all those who persecute them. They really will continue to speak the truth and endure.

But the time of all the fulfillment of all of these prophecies is to be seen in two ways; the immediate fulfillment and the long term fulfillment. As I have said, every generation since John's has had a part in the fulfillment of this book, and there is more yet to go. The Apostle Peter says in 2 Peter 3: 8 - "But beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day." That is why John says that the time is near. That is why John is showing Christ's servants in every generation what must shortly take place. The whole church is involved in every generation in the fulfillment of this prophecy. Each generation has a part and to each generation this book is designed to speak. That doesn't mean that there are not exact fulfillments at certain points in time of certain of the prophecies, but it means that the design of the book is to minister to each and every generation of the church.

And finally- the book of Revelation is a vision given to bless those who will be obedient to its exhortations.

Blessed is the person who not only reads and hears the words of this prophecy, but blessed is the person who keeps those things that are written in it. There are many exhortations in this book and that is why I believe our study of this book will be very timely and profitable to each one of us. It will surprise us how practical a book this will be. I hope that you will eagerly look into this book, not only when I preach to you to make clear some of the mysteries of it, but that you will study it to keep the exhortations that you find there in your hearts, to do them and to keep them. There is a special blessing there for those who will.