



Sunday, September 10, 2023
Revelation 1:1-12a

Today we are starting a brand new series entitled, 'We the Church' which is going to be an in-depth study of the seven churches that the Book of Revelation is written to. Now, although it is a letter written to seven churches, the reality is that the Book of Revelation is nothing like the other letters written to other churches such as Ephesians, Corinthians, or Philippians! The Book of Revelation is very, very different. It is a book full of weird and even frightening imagery, a story full of seemingly obscure symbolism. In it we meet a man who is clothed in a robe, his eyes are a flame of fire, his face shines like the sun. We meet a great red dragon who has ten horns and seven heads, and a beast from the sea that has ten horns and seven heads, and a beast from the earth that has two horns like a lamb, but speaks like a dragon. We meet creatures who have eyes in the front and the back. We meet four horsemen, three of whom bring devastation upon the earth. We hear of this massive earthquake, the sun becomes so black it looks like sackcloth, the moon looks like blood. There are locusts as big as horses, with faces like men, and on it goes. And the chief figure in the whole book is a Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes. Perhaps a better title for a series on the Book of Revelation would be something like, 'The End is Near,' or how about, 'The Final Judgment.' Or what about, 'Eternity Doomed?' OR.....'Left Behind.' But titles like this, suggest a widely accepted misunderstanding of the actual heart and intent of this book and why it was specifically written to these seven churches in the first place.

Generally speaking when most people think of the Book of Revelation one of three things comes to mind:

The second coming of Jesus Christ, the Great Tribulation and the Mark of the Beast.

Now, because these are generally the most popular reasons for reading this book, when the book of Revelation is approached inside this framework, it can understandably strike fear and even dread into the hearts of its readers because it can often create more questions than answers: Will Jesus come back in my lifetime? And if so, will we be around for the great tribulation before He comes back or will He rescue us and take us home before the persecution starts. And in the middle of all of this, there is something called the Mark of the Beast which is a symbol of sorts that if taken there's no going back and those with the mark don't get into heaven. What if the mark of the beast already exists and I took it without realizing it? What if I have a weak moment and I take it....?? And so on and so forth.... And because these are the prevailing questions and takeaways for most people, it tends to do one of two things: It either hinders them from even reading the book, or if they do, their focus is only on those few elements, thus creating fear and dread.

However, despite its often grim and intense imagery and seeming fear-mongering, the book of Revelation is actually fundamentally a book of hope - great hope. That despite the sufferings and tribulations that believers may face in this world, they have a sure and steadfast hope in the ultimate victory of Christ and the promise of eternal life with God. And this hope should then serve as an anchor, encouraging faithfulness and perseverance.

You see it's not too far off from Peter's letter is it? In 1 Peter, Peter reminds his church that elements of suffering are to be considered normative for the Christian - that the ways of the world and the ways of Christ are not in sync with each other and because of that, there will likely be times of distress and trials that result. His encouragement though is for them not to fear but to understand that God uses seasons like these to strengthen us as we grow and mature in our relationship with Him - knowing that He never leaves us nor forsakes us. Now in the Book of Revelation, John takes it a step further and talks to seven specific churches, who have seven specific challenges, and essentially identifies each challenge and encourages them to keep on keeping on with their eyes focused on Jesus Christ alone.

You see, no other book in the Bible gives us the most comprehensive portrait of Jesus Christ. After all, this book is aptly titled, 'The Revelation of Jesus Christ' not 'Revelations' as many incorrectly refer to it as. Nor is it the revelation of John, nor is it the revelation of the last days. It's the revelation of Jesus Christ. We'll get more into that in just a moment, but if you have your Bibles this morning, please turn with me to the beginning of the Book of Revelation. Even though this series is primarily focused on the seven churches that this book is being written to, that doesn't come until Chapter 2 and so it's important that we read from the beginning to get proper perspective before diving in:

Revelation 1:1-12a (NKJV)

“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.

8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

9 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. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, 11 saying, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,” and, “What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.” 12 Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me...’

The first thing we need to see is the opening title. The name of the book as John calls it: The Revelation of Jesus Christ. The word revelation in the Greek is the word 'apokalypsis' which is where we get the English word Apocalypse from. So the English translation for the name of this book is literally, 'The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ.' Which to me is kind of interesting because for many of us, when we hear the term apocalypse, we think of it in jarring and negative terms - that something bad is about to happen. And that's how media uses the word as well. They speak of riots and earthquakes or weird weather patterns as apocalyptic. We've all seen the Hollywood movies and television shows that show apocalyptic happenings and destructive forces of nature. All of this however, is inappropriately labeled apocalyptic and should more appropriately be called cataclysmic because ultimately the term apocalypse simply means, 'a disclosure or laying bare of truth.' Which is why in ancient first century times when people heard this word, they would actually get excited because apocalypse simply meant taking the cover off of a box, opening a door or a window, or pulling back a curtain. You take the cover off the box, you open the door, you pull back the curtain, in order to reveal that which is inside. And so, the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ is exactly that. It is revealing to us, the nature and the imagery of Jesus Christ, in ways that all throughout the Bible have not yet been seen. He first appears as a man in a robe with a golden chest, wool-like hair, eyes of fire, feet of brass, voice like that of rushing waters and then we next meet him as a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes, and then we meet him as a Shepherd, and then on and on it goes.

So the Book of Revelation is pulling back the curtain to what was previously unseen so that it can now be seen. The breaking through from the hiddenness of Jesus Christ, by Jesus Christ, about Jesus Christ. And the interesting thing about this context now is that this revelation is purposed to help shape how the seven churches will live in their present realities. For example, in Chapters 21 and 22 we learn that when Jesus returns, He's going to create a new heaven and a new earth. And this 'apocalypse' should initiate hope and anticipation in our hearts; and that hope and anticipation should then inform us how we live our lives with that new reality in mind.

I've been using this type of behaviour all my life:

Example: my wife making me go to Disney when we were first married but me not really wanting to go. However, I had just purchased a new/used sports car and it was going to be all ready to drive when I got back so I used that as the apocalypse (something that will be revealed) which would give me something to look forward to and help me get through a week of Mickey Mouse. It's the same with a work/weekend.

And that right there is the purpose of this book - to allow the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ to instil great hope in our hearts, and to inform us with great anticipation how we - in light of this - should

now live our lives.

And because this is a letter that is written to seven churches, the title, 'We, the Church,' is actually very fitting, because it is an opportunity for us to insert ourselves into this story as Kingsview Community Church in order to see what message the Lord specifically has for us as well.

Longest intro ever!!!!!!

The story for us really starts in verse 9 but Vs. 1-8 are kind of like the prologue where John sets the stage and gets the reader ready for the story by declaring the love and sovereignty of Jesus Christ. Literally everything that is about to unfold is underscored by the Love of Jesus Christ for His children and His sovereignty as Lord of all.

I find verse 8 of particular interest because John just doesn't refer to Jesus as the Alpha and the Omega. He continues by saying... "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

Make no mistake - John is making it very clear that even before approaching the most epic of stories and spiritual of scenes, Jesus is victorious. He says, I am the Alpha and the Omega. These are the literal first and last letters of the Hebrew Alphabet. But if that's not clear enough, John goes on to say that He is also the Beginning and the End. The word beginning is the Greek word 'archē' which means source and origin. Everything starts with Him. It's the same word that we get the word architect from in English. He's the source of all things. And the word 'end' is the Greek word, 'telos,' which means finish or inherent destiny. So, Jesus Christ, right there in this book, declares Himself to rightly be the source, the architect, of all of creation. And He is the inherent destiny of everything in creation. But if that's still not enough to set the tone of this story, John continues again by saying, 'who is and who was and who is to come...' He makes it clear that He is eternal. Time does not control Him. He controls time. He created time and therefore is the only one that can instruct time how to operate. But wait there's more!!! Finally John states that Jesus is the Almighty which is the Greek word 'pantokratōr' which simply means, 'he who holds sway over all things.' Don't you see what John is doing here? He's prefacing everything that we are about to read by making it implicitly clear, that there can be no shadow of doubt that Jesus is God.

And all of this is underscored by His love for us in verse 5. That Eternal God loves us. I think John does this on purpose because when He goes on to give these frightening descriptions of Jesus with fire in his eyes, thundering voice and countenance as intense as the sun he makes it implicitly clear

that this Guy is for us not against us. That he's fighting for us. Because He loves us. And oh, by the way He can't lose, because as we already saw, Death can't hold Him because He is the Source, He is the Origin. He wins. This, is the premise with which John introduces this most incredible of stories.

And so in verse 9 John indicates that he received the vision from the Lord while he was on the island of Patmos. It says that he was '...in the Spirit on the Lord's Day.' The phrase 'Lord's Day' is of particular interest here and has been traditionally understood to refer to Sunday, the first day of the week, which by John's time was already being observed by many Christians as a day of worship and commemoration of Jesus' resurrection. It's worth noting that the term used here is not "Sabbath," which typically refers to the seventh day (Saturday). Instead, "the Lord's Day" became a term distinctively Christian, emphasizing the resurrection of Christ and distinguishing it from the Jewish Sabbath.

So basically it's Sunday and John is at church. It says that while at 'church' John was, 'in the Spirit' when this vision appeared to him indicating that he was in a state of spiritual receptivity, possibly during a time of prayer or worship. And it's important to note that what transpired while he was worshipping wasn't a dream, but a vision. John saw with his eyes, not with his mind. Vs. 12 specifically says that he turned to see the voice that was speaking so this could not have been a dream. Jesus was showing him something. In fact, in this letter, we will read that simple phrase, 'John saw,' 24 more times. The imagery that was then unfolded to John by the Spirit was very specific and included many different images, many different scenes and many diverse characters.

I'm not entirely sure how Jesus would have displayed this vision to John, but I get the impression that what he saw before him would have been similar to that of a play with various sets, characters, costume changes, scenes and so on. And I think what makes this play, so unique is how John records it. He doesn't try and give explanation or reasoning to the events that are happening. No, he simply records what he sees. And so for the reader, there is a strong sense that we cannot read this simply with eyes of the flesh, but that we need the guidance of the Holy Spirit to allow us to see the depth of truth within the story. Almost like an interpreter.

Example: Stratford Festival. My wife and I went to see a Shakespeare play entitled Much ADO about Nothing and let's just say that my wife acted like the Holy Spirit in giving me revelation of what was happening on stage as the characters change places and the scenes developed in images, changes and all sorts of things happened. I was so lost. And so it's with this mindset that as we walk through the message that Jesus had for the seven churches in Asia that we ask the Holy Spirit to lead us in truth every single step of the way.

Over the next few weeks, we are going to get into some of the nitty-gritty and fascinating details, and the imagery and symbolism that is held in this book. As this is an introductory message to the book of revelation, it can be hard to pull specific application out of it today. But I'd like to leave you with two points to consider today:

Just as John prefaces this story with the declaration of the love of Jesus it's a strong reminder today that Jesus loves you. You don't have to fear. He goes before you, beside you, behind you, beneath you and above you. You can read this book knowing that the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ is meant to bring you great hope, not fear. The image of Jesus that we will read about in future weeks with eyes ablaze and countenance as fierce as the sun can potentially be an image of fear - but the image that we are to see is that He is fighting for us - because He loves you!

I love how John was worshipping at church and the Lord spoke to him in that moment. For me it's a reminder the God wants to speak to us and that somehow in the posture of worship where our minds and hearts, words and hands are focused on Him, we're finally at a place where we can hear what He wants to say to us. It may not be an audible voice like with John, but make no mistake, He loves you and wants to speak to your heart and tell you that He loves you as much as you tell Him that you love Him.

Josh Hageman

Lead Pastor

Kingsview Community Church

Stoney Creek, ON

www.kingsviewchurch.com

<https://www.facebook.com/KingsviewCommunityChurch/>