

February 3, 2019 “Revelation 1: He has made us to be a kingdom?” by Pastor Chris Myers-Tegeder

This morning we are beginning a series on the book of Revelation. Many people, including myself, have approached the book of Revelation with some pre-assumptions or conceptions. And often they don't line up with what is really in the book or the purpose of the book. I wrote my chimes article as an introduction to this book, but it did not get printed before last Sunday. Some of you on the email list probably saw the link to it this past week. But I am guessing the majority of you did not get a chance to read that introduction. So I am going to give you a brief introduction now before we jump into Revelation chapter 1.

Now, revelation is what we can call an apocalyptic book. And the word “apocalyptic” brings all sorts of things to our minds as westerners. Movies about the end of the world like “Day after tomorrow” and “Extinction” and “the Book of Eli” come to mind. And of course those movies are doom and gloom about the end of the world. But the book of Revelation is not ultimately about doom and gloom. It is about the end of the world as we know it now, but it is more about the beginning of eternity with God. It is a hopeful and promising book because it is about the second coming of Jesus Christ, the Jesus Christ that we worship every week for what he did in his first coming. So you have to try to put the doom and gloom movie scenes out of your head.

Also, when reading the book of Revelation it helps to know the structure. The structure is important to consider because it helps us figure out how much of the book has already happened and how much has not yet happened. Revelation is a mix of both. So if you are a note taker you might want to write this down. What we will look at today is the beginning introduction and I will get into that in more detail in a minute. This is followed by letters to the seven churches in chapters 2-3. These would have been real time letters to seven real churches, so these are in the past. Then chapters 4 and 5 are a vision of Christ on the throne of heaven, which is where Christ was then and where Christ is still now. Then chapters 6-19 are composed of three series of seven judgements. And it is important to note that these are not chronological but probably parallel each other happening at the same time. This makes sense, because otherwise the world as we know it comes to an end three times, which makes no sense and is not possible. So some of what is in these three parallel accounts may be in the past, but the end parts, which would end at the same time, are in the future. Then chapters 20-22 are a description of the coming of the final kingdom, where Christ is victorious.

So that is the structure. It also helps to know what context this book was written. This is recorded by the apostle John while in exile on Patmos. It then was probably delivered to the seven churches after the death of Nero near the end of the first century. And although it is widely agreed that this was delivered to churches under persecution in order to encourage them that yes, Jesus is coming back and he will be victorious in the end, this revelation is also a warning to churches to not compromise and adapt to the culture around them. Rather to stick to what they have been taught and to the truth of Jesus Christ executed, resurrected, and ascended.

And lastly, there is the warning I gave in that article of introduction. Did anyone read it? What was the warning? Put the newspaper down! What do I mean by that? Do not attempt to read Revelation alongside current events or even past events in the news. It does not work and it is not meant to be read that way. Revelation was never meant to be reconciled with current events and it is misguided to read it that way. I will give you an example: in Revelation 16:12 the 6th angel pours its judgement on the Euphrates river and waits for an invasion by three kings from the East. Prior to WWI all of Europe was convinced that this represented the Ottoman Empire. Well, the Ottoman Empire did make inroads to Europe in the 15th and 16th Centuries, but the empire came to an end in 1922. The end of the world did not come. So after WWI everyone shifted their gaze East to imperial Japan. They would be the invaders from the East. Well, after we signed a peace agreement

with Japan after WWII and the end of the world did not come, then people shifted their gaze to China. And the list goes on. Do you see how unhelpful this is? You will completely miss the lessons of Revelation if you spend your time trying to figure who and when. What is most important is that this is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. It is the coming of Christ's kingdom revealed. And that is where we begin in chapter one.

Revelation 1:1-8

The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,² who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.³ Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.⁴ John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits^[a] before his throne,⁵ and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

⁷“Look, he is coming with the clouds,”^[b]
and “every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him”;
and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.”^[c]
So shall it be! 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.”

The first line of this passage is “the Revelation from Jesus Christ.” That is the actual full title of this book of prophecy. We sometimes shorten titles like we typically shorten the “Acts of the Apostles” to just “Acts.” But the full title here is the “Revelation of Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ is the author. That is important to remember. John is very careful here to not take any credit. He calls himself a servant that is recording the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. So if Jesus is the author of this book it is probably pretty important and we should read it.

Then verse 3 says this “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.” John is speaking very practically here. In the first century there were no printed books and most people did not need to learn to read. So in the early churches they would have had scripture read to them and they would learn it by listening. So this is wording that would make sense to the first generation of hearers of this book. “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy,” (that would have been the leader that knew how to read) “and blessed are those who hear it” (that would have been the people in the seven churches) but now here is an important part, it then says “and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.” Take to heart what is written in it. In other words, take it seriously. Don't just hear it and then go home. Take it to heart, take it home with you, apply it to your life. And this is the first point for the book of Revelation. We need to take this seriously. Jesus is coming back. And some people have gotten caught up on the last line of that verse where it says “because the time is near.” You may be thinking, 2000 years later, that does not seem so near. We know some of what has already happened was near for the early churches. But the second coming of Christ is still imminent. “The time

is near” is a rhetorical way of saying be ready. Jesus’ second coming will be unexpected, since we are told we will not know the day or time, and it will intrude on our preoccupied world. So Christians need to pay attention and be ready.

Then John greets the churches and in this greeting I love that he reminds them not only that they have been saved, but he states what they have been saved for. He looks forward. Starting in verse 4 “John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.” John reminds them that they have been saved by “him who loves us” and then states that Jesus (verse 6) “has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.” That is what we are here for. To serve God. We are not here to just hang out until the second coming happens. We are not in limbo. God is acting now and we are to serve and be part of God’s action now.

Then starting in verse 7 are quotes from Daniel and Zechariah. Also books with apocalyptic prophecies in them. And I want to note here that we should remember that Revelation as an apocalyptic book is not alone. It does not stand alone. There are other apocalyptic books in the Bible, like Daniel, like Ezekiel, and that this book is revealed to believers that should be familiar with those books. There are connections between Revelation and those other books. So when something sounds strange, know that it is partly because we are not as familiar with those books and we are not as familiar with 1st century writing and symbolism. And Pastor Mike will help you along the way with that. But just remember that this book is a part of a whole scripture we know as the Bible and there are connections to other books.

So, he quotes Daniel saying “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him.” There are some interesting things here when related to the rest of scripture. If you remember in the book of Acts Jesus ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives with disciples and followers looking on. It was a somewhat private event. But here we have a contrast. This states that when Jesus returns it will not be a private event. And we won’t have to be at the Mount of Olives to witness it. Every eye will see him, even the people that crucified him. In other words all of human history, whether followers of Christ or not, will see him when he comes again.

And then verse 8 which is so wonderful because Jesus is speaking. He says “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” This is a reminder of the most important thing to know about God, that God is in control. God surpasses time and everything in it. For our responsive reading that I included this morning Jesus is having that argument with the religious leaders. And when they get so mad at Jesus’ authority claiming to have known Abraham they say (if you look back in your bulletin towards the end of the responsive reading) they basically tell him you are being ridiculous, you are not yet fifty years old and you say you have seen Abraham. Look at Jesus’ response. “Very truly I tell you, before Abraham was born, I am!” Jesus has been telling us this since his ministry on earth. God is in control over the complete expanse of time and we only see a very little part of that in this life.

The book of Revelation was a message to the churches and to us that God is still in control. Not that the Old Testament doesn’t already tell us this. It does. Psalm 33:11 says “But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.” God is in control from beginning to end. This was probably

an encouragement to the early churches who were under persecution and expecting Jesus to come back before the end of the 1st Century.

But this can also be a source of encouragement for us living in a broken world. What does knowing God is in control mean for us now? For me, when a tragedy happens that I just cannot understand or fathom, and there seems to be no lack of this on the evening news these days, I remind myself of the end of the book of Revelation where God rights everything. The God that created every one of us will also have the last say. And God's promise for his followers is a good one. Commentator Craig Keener, who happened to be one of my professors when I was in seminary, said this: "Remembering that God is Lord of history puts our lives in perspective. No situation we encounter takes God by surprise." I like that: "No situation we encounter takes God by surprise." This means no matter what is going on in our lives, God knows it and understands it and even knows the outcome when we don't. It also means that God will use everything towards his purpose. Even when things are not going our way, God can use that.

The other reason knowing that God is in control is important is that we know how this ends. The book of Revelation tells us how it ends. Jesus is victorious and his wonderful kingdom is established. It does not give us the exact when or how, but we know God wins. I was reading a piece by Pastor Francis Chan and he was recounting a time when his wife and he did not have cable a friend of theirs gave them the complete second season of the TV show "24" on DVD. The current season on cable was season 4 or 5 but they watched season 2 on DVD. And he was getting really into one of the episodes where Jack Bauer is about to go into a room that has a hundred guys waiting to kill him and Chan starts to get worked up that he shouldn't go in, it won't end well, he's not going to make it...and then he realizes he is watching an episode from season 2. Bauer is still alive in the current season of 4 or 5. And Chan says he realized he knows how this ends. And it changed his perspective on the watching that episode. Of course Bauer will be fine. And his anticipation of Jack Bauer entering a room with a hundred guns pointed at him changes.

Knowing how this ends should change our perspective while living it. Knowing that God is in control, the alpha and omega, the one who was and is and is to come, that should shape the life of a Christian and of the church. The time we are in now is an important time when the work of the church is to bring as many as possible to the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord. We are not supposed to simply wait. We are supposed to be doing the work of the church that Jesus established. Remember verse 6 which says he "has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father." Your role is to be a priest, a leader. So I want you to think about how that can be worked out in your life. How can you serve a living God that is and is coming again? How are you to serve God? Is it at work? Is it at school? Is it witnessing to a neighbor or a friend or a family member? As we go to the Lord's table this morning I want to go back to verse 5 of this passage. It says "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,"...that is what this table reminds us of this morning. This is why Jesus told us to do this until the second coming. This is part of what we are to do in this time in between. And then that verse says "and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father" That is what we are here for. Jesus' work to save us is done and now the work of the church is to serve him and continue his work until he comes again. Amen.