

Revelation 1:1-20

“Imagination Station” – (Adventures in Odyssey)

IMAGINE being a Christian at the time of Jesus and you had seen the crucified and risen Christ. The great tragedy of his death became a resounding source of hope and joy in the face of the resurrection.

Despite early opposition from the religious leaders, the group of followers grew. 3000 were added in one day just 50 days after the resurrection. Jews from around the empire were hearing of the Messiah and were trusting in Christ. Believers were scattered and continued to preach and see converts, even among the gentiles.

While Rome was not paying much attention to this new sect, the church was growing, while many saw it as an offshoot of Judaism.

By the mid 60's AD Christians were gaining ground and attention from Rome. Nero blamed them for the great fire that ruined much of the city of Rome. The Jews were 'acting up' again in the region of Israel, and in 70- AD Jerusalem was sacked, and the Temple destroyed.

At this point, Jews and Christians were being seen as two very distinct groups.

The next 20-30 years saw an increase in persecution of the church. The church grew but it had no collected accounts of Christ that were widespread. Paul, Peter, James, and John had written letters which were copied and passed around from church to church, but the average Christian had nothing to take home and read. Yet, these 1st century believers were bold in worship and witness (the word 'witness' in Greek is 'martyr').

THIRD MILL The resurrection of Christ allowed his disciples to understand Jesus' ministry, suffering and death from a completely new perspective of eternal life and eternal hope. Into this context, John wrote the book of Revelation. His readers needed this fresh perspective.

The early church faced persecution from the powerful Roman Empire, and many Christians began to view this as a defeat.

HOW WOULD AN AUDIENCE IN THIS CONTEXT UNDERSTAND AND RECEIVE Revelation? How would they understand the references to Babylon, the beast, the dragon, etc?

What would they need to stand firm? CONFIDENCE AND HOPE

John encouraged his readers to find both comfort and confidence in the victory that Jesus achieved at his resurrection. He wanted them to understand that even if their lives ended in martyrdom, that wouldn't be the end of their story either. Eventually, Jesus would consummate his kingdom, and every believer that had ever lived would share in his victory.

That was the GOOD NEWS of the Revelation – Christ has won, Christ is winning, Christ will win.

That message brought comfort to believers in the Roman Empire for another 200 years in which they experienced times of persecution and trial.

NOW IMAGINE being a Christian who could remember the last significant persecution by the empire ~305 AD and how Revelation spoke to you during those difficult years. Then in 313 The Edict of Milan granted religious toleration and soon Christianity becomes the accepted religion.

HOW WOULD THAT CHANGE YOUR VIEW OF Babylon, i.e. Rome, i.e. 'the State'?

Rome, the empire, was NOW showing favor to the church, and the church and state began to become intertwined.

It could be a blessing or a DANGER. And it was and continues to be both.

How would a Christian in 350 AD view Revelation differently from the Christian in 90 AD, 1050 AD or 2021?

It would depend on where you lived in the world and how you understand the spiritual battle that is going on.

We need to remember that Revelation was written FOR US today, but it had a different original audience. Let's avoid the chronological arrogance of thinking that the most important meaning of Revelation is what it means for us TODAY. We stand on the shoulders of the saints who have gone before us.

By the 5th century Christian art, sculpture and architecture were depicting scenes of Christ enthroned in glory. For them, it must have seemed like the Millennial empire had arrived.

Theological and ecclesiological debates shaped the interpretations over the years as did differing views of how Christians were to engage with the world.

The history of interpretation is WAY TOO COMPLEX TO get into here but suffice it to say that God's people have been struggling with the text of Revelation for 2000 years.

So that the whole series isn't too wonky, just remember that we in 2021 need the same Christ centered perspective that believers needed in 90 AD. While we may not yet face the same overt dangers, we do face dangers of the same kind – COMPROMISE WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE.

In 90 AD the threat came from the outside – the Roman Empire. Today, the threat of compromise often comes from within the visible church. These threats will be spelled out more clearly as we move through the book.

This opening chapter gives us a Prologue(v.1-8) which states The Purpose – “to show” what must soon take place and to announce a blessing to all who read, hear, and heed the book.

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bondservants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated *it* by His angel to His bond-servant John, 2 who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

What was written for that audience is intended for us today as well. Revelation wasn't written TO US, but it was written FOR US, just like the rest of scripture.

This God given Revelation or unveiling is so that the audience would not be uninformed. It was important for the audience of believers to be encouraged in times of great pressure and strife. It was also designed to challenge the believers to be faithful to Christ, who is the ultimate Victor.

This Revelation was an eye-opener so that the Christians might discern the forces of evil and compromise that surrounded them.

v.1 ...“The things which must soon take place”... I agree with Beale and Campbell in noting that **“The focus of “quickness” and “nearness” in vv. 1-3 is primarily on the inauguration of prophetic fulfillment and its ongoing aspect rather than nearness of consummate fulfillment (the return of the Lord), though the latter thought is secondarily present.” P36**

The apocalyptic, prophetic, pastoral letter sounded a message of ultimate triumph -

11:15 Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying,

“The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.”

The letter also sounded a message of challenge and warning

3:15 ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 16So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.

...19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.

The letter also brings an invitation...3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. 21He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’ ”

WHO BRINGS THIS MESSAGE? V. 4-8; 14-18

..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 of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood— 6 and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

This prologue gives us a Christ-centered vision of a global victory and eternal authority. Jesus is depicted in the roles of prophet, priest, and king.

As the faithful witness he is a prophet of truth. (‘witness’ is the word martyr)

As priest, he washes us by His own blood, and makes us priests.

As king, he receives glory and dominion with the Father forever and ever.

Jesus is presented as the eternal one, the Alpha and Omega, who is and who was and who is to come.

7 BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to 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.”

God is by nature and definition the one who has always existed. Moses learned the name of God in Exodus – Yahweh – “I am that I am”, i.e. the one who has always been.

** Here is a simple reality if you find yourself talking one who doubts the existence of God.

Sproul – “There must be something that has in itself the power of being or else nothing would be for nothing could be.” IF ANYTHING exists, then something has in itself the power of being, i.e. God.

If there is no God, then we are alone in a cold dark universe and the foundational rule is “every man does that which is right in his own eyes.” We’ve seen that movie – Judges

From the inscription page of “Good without God”...

Where is my light?
My light is in me.

Where is my hope?
My hope is in me.
Where is my strength?
My strength is in me...and in you.
SHERWIN WINE, "WHERE IS MY LIGHT?"
(SONG OF HUMANISTIC JUDAISM)

This hope in me and in you doesn't compare to the HOPE we have in Christ. He alone can release us from our sins and bring eternal life.

The one who speaks is the one who gave Himself for us...Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood— 6 and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father.

IMAGINE HOW THOSE WORDS SOUNDED TO THE ORIGINAL AUDIENCE...believers who were being persecuted for their faith.

These truths turned their inner world upside down and they should do the same for us today.

We are objects of His love, recipients of release from sins, and we have a new eternal identity – a kingdom and priests to His God and Father.

Who doesn't want to be LOVED? (silly question).

We ALL want to be loved. So many songs come to my mind just thinking about it.

LOVE – gained, lost, unrequited or never experienced is the theme of most popular songs, movies, novels, etc.

Example:

"The greatest thing you'll ever learn is just to love and be loved in return." - Moulin Rouge

I doubt the author of Moulin Rouge had the gospel in mind, but the love of God for us in Christ is the ultimate message of love.

EX: in a men's group Tuesday morning we were discussing "Gentle and Lowly", by Dane Ortlund and one of the themes that was mentioned was the depth and greatness of the love of God.

We have a hard time wrapping our minds and hearts around it. It is too good to be true, yet it is. To paraphrase Ortlund, "Only as we walk ever deeper in the love of Christ can we live the Christian life that is described in the NT."

Jesus loves us by dying in our place so that we might be released from our sins by His blood.

God is so holy that our forgiveness meant that Jesus had to die; He is so loving that Jesus was glad to die.

As a result, we are released from our sins – released from the penalty and power of sin. Again, that is hard to wrap our minds and hearts around but as we do, we are transformed.

This deliverance by blood is hyper-linked to the Exodus where God delivers all of those who are in the home marked with the blood of the sacrifice. Exodus is the great OT PICTURE of salvation that points to the "true and ultimate Exodus" that Jesus accomplished on the cross.

This salvation and deliverance mean that we have a new eternal identity – a kingdom and priests to His God and Father.

We who were lost, hopeless, helpless, enemies, and strangers to God are now a kingdom and priests. That is the greatest transformation story ever told.

EX: a poor under resourced child that is adopted into a wealthy family – EVERYTHING changes. A whole new world is opened up. That is what happens to us when we come to know Christ by faith. We are no longer held in bondage to the flesh and the power of sin, but we are brought into the family of the king and are given newness of life through the Holy Spirit.

This change of identity is also a reason for the conflict that will be revealed in later chapters. The kingdoms of this world are hostile to the kingdom of God and the people of that kingdom.

Revelation gives us a picture of Jesus who is walking among the churches and is also glorious and radiant. 1:9-20

9 I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, 11 saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. 14 His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15 His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.

17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. 19 Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. 20 As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

To sum up the prologue and all of chapter 1, we could say that **God gave John this message to bless and strengthen the churches with a Christ-centered vision of divine sovereignty and a call to faithful obedience in the face of opposition.**

The Revelation was given to strengthen souls, not tickle the imagination or provide an intellectual brain teaser. When the Christ-centered Vision becomes OUR conviction, then we are propelled into sacrificial faithfulness.

John reminds us of the GLORY OF Jesus Christ is the one who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood— 6 and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father.

The original audience needed that message and so do we.
AMEN

RESOURCES:

KOESTER – Revelation

Gorman – RRR

Johnson – Studies

Wilcox – Bible Speaks Today

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