

Taking Revelation to Heart

July 10, 2022 from Revelation 1:1-20

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Please read Revelation 1:1-20 before going further in this transcript.

Today we're beginning a new sermon series on the book of Revelation. Let's begin by considering the genre/style of this book. Revelation is clearly apocalyptic.¹ Revelation 1:1 begins, "The revelation from Jesus Christ..." Revelation comes from the Greek word ἀποκάλυψις² (apocalypse), which refers to an unveiling or revealing of truth. Thus, we call it the book of Revelation. Revelation uses vivid imagery to get its point across, which is incredibly intriguing. It piques our interest and fuels our curiosity with its highly symbolic references to all kinds of strange and bizarre creatures. Revelation mentions a dragon chasing after a woman and her child, a beast coming up out of the sea, and locusts with the power of scorpions! Revelation uses these wild and crazy symbols to teach us more about our faith and what Jesus wanted to reveal to His churches some 2,000 years ago. Ultimately, these things are intended to help our church, E-Free Bemidji. Revelation will help us in our lifelong journey of becoming more deeply devoted followers of Jesus, because we'll encounter a rich theology in the book of Revelation.³

In one sense, Revelation is an exceptionally unique book of the Bible, written with apocalyptic flair! In another sense though, it is just like any other book of the Bible; God has given it to us, so that we might better understand WHO He is and HOW we should live for Him. Therefore, just like any book of the Bible, we'll begin by trying to understand what this book meant for its original 1st century readers, and then we'll consider what that has to teach US, about following Jesus in our own day and age. In other words, we're NOT going to focus on the precise details of when the predictions of Revelation will be fulfilled, or who we think the anti-Christ might be, or whatever else we might like to know. Instead, we're going to do what Revelation urges us to do...⁴

¹ "A book of visions and symbols, Revelation is the only New Testament book that concentrates on prophecy. It completes the story, begun in Genesis, of the cosmic battle between good and evil being waged on earth. It ends with a picture of a new heaven and new earth and a plea for Jesus' timely return." Logos digital version of *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

² "Making fully known, revelation, disclosure" William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 112.

³ We'll learn more about the Doctrine of God – the Father/Son/Holy Spirit and the Futility of Satan and the Cosmic War that is going on even as we sit here today. We'll consider Theodicy ("The vindication of divine goodness and providence in view of the existence of evil." Oxford Languages on Google Search) We'll be challenged with our evangelistic mission to reach the lost before the End Times reach their crescendo. We'll talk about perseverance and endurance, how to stand fast and overcome the seemingly overwhelming tide of evil in our world. And last but not least, we'll learn about Worship. Revelation is filled with references to worship. It helps us better understand just WHO it is that we are worshipping and WHY He alone is so worthy of our sincere love and full devotion. See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, pp. 31-49.

⁴ Or whether the locusts in Revelation 9 represent modern-day Apache helicopters. Some prophecy teachers have speculated whether the Apache, first produced in 1975, might fit John's description of the locusts in Revelation 9:9. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boeing_AH-64_Apache This is HIGHLY speculative at best and hermeneutically misguided at worst.

Revelation urges us to take it to heart.⁵ Revelation 1:3 makes this clear right from the get-go, “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.” We should read it, so that we can hear it, and then take it to heart. “Take to heart” can also be translated “KEEP what is written.”⁶ So we could say: “Read it, hear it, keep it!” (Or we could say, “read it and heed it!” That’s what brings a promised blessing from the book of Revelation.)⁷

When it comes to the book of Revelation, it’s easy to lean toward one of two extremes. We either completely ignore it because it intimidates us, because its apocalyptic approach is so bizarre and foreign to us. Or, we obsess over it, by trying to “crack the code.” We try SO hard to crossmatch each verse from Revelation with today’s news headlines. Now, being curious about these things is completely understandable. However, it becomes a foolish waste of time, even dangerous, when we try to figure out the exact “times or dates” that God has planned. The early Christians wanted to know these details as well.⁸ Acts 1:6-7 reminds us, “Then they gathered around [Jesus] and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.” And so, we are going to honor Jesus’ instruction here and not spend our time and energy trying to determine the exact details of when the prophecies in Revelation will be fulfilled. Instead, we’re going to do what the book itself tells us to do, what Jesus Himself tells us to do: We’re going to TAKE IT TO HEART!⁹

Revelation 1:3 gives us a compelling reason why this revelation from Jesus should be taken to heart: “BECAUSE the time is near.”¹⁰ Verse 7 foresees it: “Look, He is coming with the clouds!” The entire book is fueled by an anticipation for the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ, when He will return and make everything right, and make everything new. Jesus will fulfill all that has been prophesied about Him in both the Old and New Testaments. In fact, you may have noticed that verse 3 refers to the words of Revelation as prophecy. The fact is, the book of Revelation is actually a combination of three different genres, yes it’s apocalyptic (verse 1), but it’s also prophetic (verse 3) –

⁵ Τηρέω = keep, take to heart. “to persist in obedience, keep, observe, fulfill, pay attention to, especially of law and teaching.” William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1002.

⁶ See the *ESV*.

⁷ Back in John’s day, Christ-followers didn’t all have their own copy of the Bible, so they had to come to church where they could hear it read aloud. So our Scripture reader today, is blessed to have read God’s Word out loud for us, and they have also blessed all of us who were able to hear it read.

⁸ Consider 1 Peter 1:10-12.

⁹ I really appreciate how Pastor Matt Chandler says it: “Obedience is more important than revelation.” (From his sermon “Intro to Revelation.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FXqdzYGU3A>) In a day and age when many prophecy “experts” have run wild, that’s really worth thinking about: “OBEDIENCE is more important than revelation.”

¹⁰ Revelation has “seventeen places that emphasize the nearness of the end (1:1, 3; 2:16, 25; 3:11, 20; 6:11; 10:6; 11:2-3; 12:6, 12; 17:10; 22:6, 7, 10, 12, 20). The presence of eleven of them in the introductory and closing sections (chaps. 1-3, 22) shows that this is a critical emphasis for the church.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 73.

similar to many of the Old Testament prophetic books like Daniel and Ezekiel¹¹, and it's also a letter (verse 4).¹²

Revelation 1:4 offers this opening greeting: "John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you...." This is similar to the greetings in many of the other New Testament letters. Although there is some debate over which John this is, most scholars agree that this is most likely the apostle John. The same John who wrote the Gospel of John as well as the letters of first, second, and third John.¹³ We learn about more about the occasion for writing this letter in Revelation 1:9, "I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos¹⁴ because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." I had hoped to visit this island during our tour of the 7 churches, but unfortunately, we got there one week before the official travel season opened. The closest we got was Kusadasi, on the western coast of Turkey, on the Aegean Sea. Patmos is about 50 miles SW of here. The reason John was on this particular island is that it was likely a Roman penal colony. "Most likely John was temporarily banished there for proclaiming the gospel."¹⁵ In fact, a historian named "Eusebius" recorded that John was banished there in A.D. 95, near the end of the Roman Emperor Domitian's reign.^{16 17} This was a tough time in history for Christians. It was a time of persecution and suffering, which is why John calls himself their "companion in the suffering."

So that's the predicament that John is in when, all of a sudden, he receives a vision. He hears a loud voice behind him like a trumpet¹⁸, so he turns around to see who it was. Before we take a look at what John saw, let's jump ahead to Revelation 1:17-18, "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." So John sees a vision of the Living Christ. How do you think you would respond if the Living Christ appeared to you in a vision and placed His right hand on you? I think most of us would fall right over. I'm not sure whether John fell over or

¹¹ Compare Revelation 10:9-11 with Ezekiel 3:1-3.

¹² See notes in *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, pp. 2581-2582.

¹³ So John wrote a total of five New Testament books. This John was one of Jesus' "inner three" from "Peter, James, and JOHN. This John was called "the disciple whom Jesus loved," because He was particularly close to Jesus (John 13:23). This John is the one that Jesus talked to while He was hanging on the cross. He told John "Here is your mother." And from that time on John took care of her in his own house (John 19:25-27). This John is the one who outran Peter to the empty tomb in John 20:4.

¹⁴ "PAT muhs" (W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That's Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 128.

¹⁵ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 81.

¹⁶ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 81.

¹⁷ "He was likely there only a short time and was allowed to go to Ephesus in a general amnesty for exiles by the emperor Nerva in A.D. 96 after Domitian died." Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 81.

¹⁸ Throughout the New Testament the sounding of a trumpet is often associated with the return of Jesus. In Bible times, the trumpet was used for things like signaling warfare, or signaling the arrival of a king, and even by false religions for their festive processions through the streets. (See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 84.) All of these would have likely come to mind for the first century readers.

whether he fell down at Jesus' feet in reverence. In verse 17, Jesus lays His hand on John in order to comfort him, saying "Do not be afraid."

Then, in Revelation 1:19 Jesus commissions John,¹⁹ "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later."²⁰ Revelation is a book that is filled with the "now and not yet's" of our faith. In fact, the "past, present, and future are intertwined" all throughout the entire book.²¹ Now, there's a lot that we could say here about the different interpretive approaches to Revelation: Preterist²², Historicist, Futurist, Idealist, and Eclectic. Any good Study Bible will walk you through those in its introduction.²³ For our purposes though, I really appreciate it how one author summarizes it: "Fortunately, the fundamental truths of Revelation do not depend on adopting a particular point of view. They are available to anyone who will read the book for its overall message and resist the temptation to become overly enamored with the details."²⁴ And so we're going to do just that: Keep our focus on the overall message and NOT become overly enamored with the details.

Revelation 1:20 concludes the chapter by explaining, "The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." We're going to dive deeper into these stars, and especially these lampstands, in the weeks to come. But for now, let's back up to verse 13...

Back in verses 13-16, John turned around to see who was speaking to him, and he sees a vision of Living Christ. Before we look at the details of John's description, let me ask you a question: How do you picture Jesus? Perhaps you picture Jesus as a baby lying in a manger. Or maybe you envision Jesus as a Jewish carpenter. Or as a traveling teacher with long hair, wearing sandals. Maybe there's a scene from "The Chosen" series that sticks in your mind. Maybe you've got a picture hanging on your wall at home, an artist's rendition of what Jesus may have looked like. Or, perhaps your mind goes to the gruesome image of Jesus' body hanging on the cross at calvary. Revelation records John's vision of Jesus in verses 13-16.²⁵ Verse 13 says Jesus looked "LIKE a son of man." In this description, we find echoes of Daniel 7:13, "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven." So here we see a direct connection between John's vision and Old Testament Messianic predictions. And we should also note that Jesus looked

¹⁹ See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 94.

²⁰ Revelation 1:1 mentions showing "what must soon take place."

²¹ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 97.

²² "PRET er ist"

²³ See *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, p. 2147 or *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2584.

²⁴ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2148.

²⁵ We'll actually find various details from this description repeated again all throughout the 7 letters in chapters 2-3. So we'll dig into them in more detail in the weeks to come. But for today, let's try to get the overall sense of what John saw.

“humanlike....”²⁶ And the fact is, that even after Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, He remains fully human, so this actually fits very well with what John saw, “one LIKE a son of man.”

Verse 13 goes on to say that Jesus was “...dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.” Jesus’ clothing points to His royalty and His high priestly position.^{27 28} Verse 14 goes on, “The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.” White hair suggests that Jesus has some age to Him. The fact is, Jesus is eternally old. We may not tend to picture Him as old, but He is most certainly incredibly old. In most cultures, when your hair is white²⁹, it’s an indication of “dignity and the accumulated wisdom of years of experience.”³⁰ John and his original readers would have had this on their minds. Eyes like blazing fire is a way of portraying Jesus’ divine insight, and His penetrating gaze that sees right into our human souls.^{31 32}

Revelation 1:15 continues, “His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.” Here the feet are pictured in “the molten state, with the [hot] metal glowing in all its purity.”^{33 34} This voice, like the sound of rushing waters, echoes back to Ezekiel 43:2, “and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory.”³⁵ John’s description wraps up in verse 16, “In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.” Jesus is not holding a shepherd’s staff, like we see in some pictures. No, this time he’s holding 7 stars which represent powerful angels that are under His authority.³⁶ Admittedly, the sharp, double-edge sword coming out of His mouth is a bit difficult to envision. But its symbolism is pretty straightforward: there is ultimate power and authority in His words. We hear echoes of Isaiah 11:4, “but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;

²⁶ “... [which] in Daniel, the Gospels, and Revelation was a messianic figure with divine overtones.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 88.

²⁷ See Exodus 28:4.

²⁸ “The day laborer wore the sash around the waist, in order to touch in a tunic for work. [Kings and rulers] wore it around the chest...to indicate high rank.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 89.

²⁹ “The wool and snow together picture pure, dazzling whiteness. There was no other way in the ancient world to portray perfect whiteness.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 90.

³⁰ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 90.

³¹ “to the core of the human situation.... Include also the fierce judgment of the God who knows and acts against those who disobey him.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 90.

³² Eyes like blazing fire will be repeated again in 2:18 in the letter to Thyatira, as well as in Revelation 19:12.

³³ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 91.

³⁴ See Revelation 2:18. “Possibly points to the bronze guild of Thyatira.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 90.

³⁵ One might wonder if John, while writing all of this down, could hear outside his window “the endless pounding of the shores of Patmos by waves of the Aegean Sea.” Citing Thomas, Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 91.

³⁶ The right hand was a symbol of power and authority. Holding these stars means that Jesus both possesses them and protects them. See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 91.

with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.”³⁷ To be clear here, this Old Testament prophecy is lining up perfectly with John’s vision of Jesus as the Messiah, who will return to rule in glory and power. One day Jesus is coming back to make things right in this world.^{38 39} John’s vision should bring to our minds a picture of Jesus as a ruler, who will judge sin and evil with perfect justice. One author notes that the sword being envisioned in the book of Revelation “was a large, broad Thracian⁴⁰ sword used in cavalry charges...quite different from the Roman ‘short sword’ ...Here it is certainly a sword of judgment.”^{41 42}

Verse 16 wraps up John’s description with Jesus’ face “like the sun shining in all its brilliance.” This brilliance is a clear indicator of Jesus’ GLORY: John’s vision of Jesus is a vision of the Glorified Christ.^{43 44} Brother or Sister in Christ, an accurate and comprehensive understanding of who Jesus truly is, will be woefully incomplete, without at least some understanding of John’s vision of the Glorified Christ in Revelation 1! Jesus is now in His glorious resurrection body. The nail scars remain, but He is victorious, and He... is glorious! I asked a local artist to try and portray what John’s vision might have looked like. Some of you know Nicholas Jackson; he’s led worship for us a few times. Here’s a piece of art that he put together, just for our church, in an effort to represent John’s vision in verses 13-16. Notice the stars in Jesus’ right hand. Notice the sword coming out of His mouth. Notice the fiery eyes. Notice the sash, and the robe, and keys on his belt. And, notice the small red scar on His right wrist.



To be clear, John’s description of Jesus in Revelation 1 wasn’t meant to be a photograph of Jesus but rather an emotive description of His power and glory.⁴⁵ John was using apocalyptic symbols to try and help us envision Jesus in a way we’re probably not used to seeing him, and yet, in a way that we need to better understand Him. So let’s allow the book of Revelation to give us a more comprehensive understanding of Jesus; of who He is, of what He’s done, and of what He will do in the future.

³⁷ See also Isaiah 49:2 and consider Romans 13:4 and 2 Thessalonians 2:8.

³⁸ Which becomes a dire warning for the church in Pergamum. See Revelation 2:12, 16.

³⁹ Later on Jesus will be described in similar terms in Revelation 19:15, “Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.” Then Revelation 19:21 goes on, “The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.”

⁴⁰ “THRAY shen”

⁴¹ Ephesians 6:17 and Hebrews 4:12 refer to the short sword. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 92.

⁴² The mouth is often used as an apocalyptic symbol of judgment: see Revelation 9:17-19; 11:5; 12:15-16; and 16:13.

⁴³ In fact, these verses have been referred to as the Glorified Christ. See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, pp. 88-93)

⁴⁴ “The glory theme is predominant.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 93.

⁴⁵ See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, pp. 88-93.

We began by learning that we should “take Revelation to heart” because the time is near for Jesus’ return. But we should also “take it to heart” because of the One who is giving us this revelation - the risen and glorious Jesus! What’s perhaps most astounding about this picture of Jesus’ glory and majesty, is that this is the same Jesus, who loves us and gave His life for us. Revelation 1:5-6, records an encouraging doxology of praise, “...To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 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.” As we partake in communion today, let’s remember that Jesus’ ultimate victory was won at the cross. Even as we look forward to Jesus’ triumphant return in power and glory, to overcome evil once and for all, let’s continue to look back with immense gratitude, for His sacrificial death on the cross.