

[Read the text]

There is much we are seeking to accomplish in our time together. However, we must know as we go into this study that there are a lot of questions that we may want answered that we will not get answers to... because that is not the intent of the book. As we approach it, we must do so with extreme caution so as not to make the book of Revelation tell us things that it does not intend to.

1. The blessing of God in divine revelation:

- The opening verse serves as a reminder to us of Daniel 2. There, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that he couldn't interpret. He calls on Daniel to interpret it. Daniel tells him: *these are the things that will take place in the latter days*. The word "latter" is the only word that is different there. We also see this language used in Daniel 10 where Daniel is told that his vision "is for days yet to come."
- What Daniel interpreted as what would happen in the latter days, John now says they "must soon take place" (v. 1). Why? Because, "the time is near" (v. 3).
- In Peter's sermon at Pentecost, one of the important things that he teaches in Acts 2:17 is that with the birth of the church, we are now living in the last days (as he quotes the Prophet Joel).
 - "The last days" as described in the New Testament are all things that happen between the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost and the return of Christ. (We'll talk about it more later, but this is also what I believe is the period referred to as the great tribulation).
- We are living in "the last days". This is the approach that we will take in our study of this book... a historical approach. How are these events transpiring through the course of history.
- Now, notice the prime directive of these first verses: "*Blessed is the one...*"
 - The one who reads aloud- John will tell us that he was exiled to Patmos BECAUSE of his testimony about Christ, but yet he is writing a letter that is intended to be read as a circular letter (meaning that it is intended to pass from church to church and be read out loud). John felt it was more important to pass on what he'd seen than to avoid any further suffering.
 - The one who hears- A large majority of those in this culture could not read and could only receive these words through oral communication. To listen to these words could find them branded as guilty by association. John seemed to think it was worth it.
 - The one who keeps what is written in it- This is where the real blessing lies. You must be affected by what is in this book. It must produce a radical transformation in us.
 - In spite of the fact that they were at odds with the reigning culture of the Roman Empire and the hostility of the Roman Emperor—they were still blessed.

- It may not seem that way, but they are still blessed—if their attitudes will properly reflect what is in the book. If they will live lives of holiness as a result of what is in the book.
- The blessing of Revelation is to know how things really are: God will bring justice to his enemies and he will ultimately demonstrate his mercy by bringing salvation to his people. This will be seen and bring glory to God. In the midst of unspeakable persecution and hardship, Jesus reveals this to John so that he can reveal it to the Church.

2. The doxology to Christ for divine provision:

Jesus is first identified in three different ways in these verses.

- First, ***he is the faithful witness***. Our English word witness comes from the Greek word that is also translated martyr. It is a forensic term and refers to those who have borne witness unto death. The word refers to someone who is put to death on behalf of a people, principle or cause. Jesus is our faithful witness and we should follow suit by being faithful witnesses ourselves.
- Secondly, he is ***“the firstborn of the dead.”*** He is the first to ever come back to life never to die again. When he rose, he rose in a glorified body. Those who are faithful witnesses like Jesus will also be raised from the dead like Jesus.
- Thirdly, he is ***“the ruler of the kings of the earth.”*** Emperor Domitian was a weak and wimpy man, but yet he demanded to be addressed as “Lord and God”. This revelation is a reminder that no matter who seems to be in control, they all answer to King Jesus. ALL of these descriptions of him are present tense. He sits on the throne. He is alive. He is in control.

The focus then turns to a doxology... which is praise to Jesus for being who he is and for what he has done.

- ***“To him who loves us”***- This is the first thing Jesus has done for us. He loves us. He has chosen to love us. Not because of our merit but because of his grace, mercy, and compassion.
- ***“he has freed us from our sins by his blood”***- his love for us led him to the cross. His death on the cross offers us freedom from our sin. The Bible clearly teaches that the one who sins must die and that sin separates us from the Holy God.
- ***“he has made us a kingdom, priests”***- not only are we free from the penalty of sin, but we are free from the bondage to sin. By making us a kingdom of priests, Jesus has laid claim to us. Our obligation is no longer to the kingdoms of this world, but rather to the kingdom of King Jesus. We are to live lives of holiness because we are members of his kingdom.
 - Persecution does not give us an excuse to ignore holiness. Insult does not give us an excuse to ignore holiness. Offense does not give us an excuse to ignore holiness. Wrongdoing does not give us an excuse to ignore holiness.

- Finally, we are told that Jesus “is coming with the clouds”. This is a common theme that we will see throughout our study as it plays on the language of Daniel 7, where Daniel portrays the promised Messiah’s receiving of an everlasting kingdom.
 - On that day, there will be both mourning and rejoicing.

3. The power of the Resurrected Christ in the midst of his Church:

The story is that John is the last of the apostles to die. They tried to kill him by dropping him in a vat of boiling oil, but he did not die. When they saw that he wouldn’t die, the exiled him to the isle of Patmos... where he was imprisoned because he was preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

John begins by identifying himself in a couple of different ways here:

- First, he says that he is their “**brother**”.- This unique term is used often in the New Testament and it is a word that we use often. All who are born again are a part of the family of God. We are bound together... not by our own blood, but by his blood.
- He also says that he is a “**partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus.**”- John is a partner in tribulation because one must enter the kingdom through patiently enduring tribulation.
 - Acts 14:22- “... *through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.*”
 - The brunt of the book seems to indicate that this great tribulation is not a literal 7 year period, but rather is the complete (the number 7) years of tribulation that the church will endure between the first and second coming of Jesus.
 - The kingdom of God does not offer you your best life now. Rather, it offers you the opposite. It offers you a life of difficulty and trouble. Affliction and hardship. Insult and injury. Persecution and offense.
- The Roman Empire promised peace but instead delivered brutality and fear. The kingdom of God promises tribulation and delivers peace, confidence, and eternal salvation. However, this is only to those who endure.
- In the end, it promises that Jesus will return and make all things right, and we know this because of the Resurrected Christ.

John sees the image of the Resurrected Christ.

This is what the Revelation means. It is an apocalyptic book... which means it’s an unveiling. It begins by unveiling the Resurrected Christ for us.

- The 7 churches represent, first, all of the churches in Asia, but also all of the churches in all time. (Again, the number 7 means completeness)
- The picture of Jesus standing in the midst of the lampstands is the fulfillment of Zechariah 4. In Zechariah, the prophet saw a lampstand and it pointed to the successful rebuilding of the temple and the renewal of God’s presence among His people (after exile).

- It finds its fulfillment in Revelation how? The Lord is not building another temple for him to dwell but rather what? He is building His CHURCH! (Don't overlook that John saw this vision on the Lord's day—Sunday)
 - The fulfillment of God's presence among His people is in the fact that God is building His Church (Matthew 16:18) and He has put His Spirit there (Acts 2—Pentecost).
 - God's plan of fulfillment to bring about His kingdom is through the Church. The church is His plan A and there is no plan B. We are the most important force on planet earth.
- In the book of Revelation, we find the Resurrected Christ where? "in the midst of the lampstands"—The Resurrected Christ stands in the midst of His Church
- Then John attempts to describe what he sees:
 - We must first understand that what John sees is an indescribable sight.
 - The description describes royalty and power and majesty. He is all seeing and all knowing. He will dispense justice. He embodies purity. This is a vision of the Resurrected Christ.
 - Upon seeing Him, John "fell at his feet as though dead." This is the impact that the vision of the Resurrected Christ has on John.
 - What about us? What impact does that vision have on us? My hope and desire is that it will cause everything else to pale in comparison. It will make that affair that you are having or thinking of having fade in beauty. It will cause that pornography to lose its luster. It will cause that materialism to lose its charm. It will cause your desire for the drugs and the alcohol and the sex and the money and power and the promotion and the popularity to lose its appeal. My hope is that the vision of the Resurrected Christ will illicit fear and wonder and amazement from us that nothing else in all the world can compare.
 - Then, notice quickly—Jesus didn't leave him there. The Bible says that "he laid his right hand on me, saying, 'Fear not...'"
 - He reminds him again that he is in control.