

Revelation 1.1-20 - Teaching Outline

- I. Introduction to Revelation 1.1-20:
- A. Fallen condition focus: Amidst suffering and persecution, we despair and lose hope because we doubt that God is for us or that He has the power to change anything.
 - B. Election years always bring out the worst in American Christians. We constantly complain about the liberals who we fear will take power and destroy this 'Christians nation.' You can hear Evangelicals joining one another in condemning those who hold differing political viewpoints fearing that this country is all going to hell in a hand basket. We assassinate the character of our political enemies with circulating emails that call the patriotism of others into question. We fly the flag and sing 'God bless America.' And what is underneath all of this behavior? A subtle fear that our freedom will disappear and life won't be as comfortable as it used to be lurks in the back of our minds. We fear political and social persecution because we don't want following Jesus to be costly.
 - C. We want America to be Christian so the kingdom of God seems more near.
- II. **Organizational Sentence:** In today's text, we will see the forward to the book of Revelation, John's greeting to the churches, and John's commission with the vision of the Son of Man, Jesus Christ.
- III. The Forward: Blessed is the one who hears and obeys. (1.1-3)
- ^{ESV} **Revelation 1:1** The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ² who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. ³ Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.
- A. The first three verses of the book make up the forward, where John titles his work, names himself as the author, and tells us the purpose and content of the book.
 - B. In naming the work, 'The Revelation of Jesus Christ', John alludes right off the bat to Daniel, where God's prophet receives visions of the mysteries of God.
 - 1. By titling his work thus, he means to say that the revelation is from Jesus Christ..
 - 2. We learn in the very next phrase that God gave Christ the revelation to give to John through angels as we shall see.
 - C. What does John mean by 'God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place'? Does this mean that God gave the revelation as a map to future events?
 - 1. No, the title of the book alludes to Daniel 2:28-29, which looks for the coming kingdom of God at 'the end' of history.

2. As we said last week, the New Testament shows us that the end, the final day of salvation has come in stages so that the kingdom is already here and yet not fully present.
 3. So, when John tells us that the purpose of this book is to show God's servants 'the things that must soon take place' he is connecting this book to the fulfillment of Daniel's framework of waiting for the final, climactic, end to history.
 4. Therefore, since we are in the last days, this does not refer only to future events that will take place at the very end, but to the church age as a whole.
 5. "John's book is a prophetic work which concerns the imminent and inaugurated fulfillment of OT prophecies about the kingdom in Jesus Christ."¹
- D. John then explains that he has borne witness by writing down this revelation which is a testimony of Jesus Christ. If you read the gospel of John, you will see that the beloved disciple, John, understands himself to be a special witness commissioned by Christ. Peter is the leader of the church and will die a martyr's death, but John will live long and fulfill a unique role as a special witness.
- E. John then concludes this forward to his book with a blessing. There are seven blessings like this in this book, and they are promises of blessing to those who persevere in faith.
1. John says the blessing is for the one who reads this book in a public worship service, and for those who hear it.
 2. This shows that the book was meant to be read in public worship.
 3. But, it also shows that **the intended response of this book is ethical**. We are blessed when we read Revelation not as a map of events but as a call to persevering, obedient faith. Revelation contains visions of God's kingdom in order to move us toward obedience in the present.
- F. Aside from gaining a general understanding of what this book is about, John's forward ensures us of God's blessing if we take heed of what he says.
1. It is common to wonder if all this Christian stuff is worth it. When we experience pain on account of our faith, or when we miss out on what looks like something which can make us happier, we begin to doubt whether or not we should go on trusting Christ is best.
 2. John begins this book by reminding us in the face of suffering and hardship that Christ is best, so we will be blessed.

IV. The Greeting: Grace and peace are from Jesus Christ. (1.4-8)

Revelation 1:4-8 ⁴ John to the seven churches that 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 kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. ⁷ Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so.

¹ Beale, G.K. The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, pg.183.

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."

- A. "John greets the churches on behalf of the Father, the Spirit, and the Son, whose redemptive work results in the churches' new status, all to God's glory."²
- B. As part of this greeting, John speaks a word of peace to the churches to comfort them by Christ's person and work.
- C. John identifies his audience by specifying the 7 churches we will see next week.
- D. He speaks the peace of God upon the saints 'from him who is and who was and who is to come'.
 - 1. This phrase is another way of saying what YHWH said of Himself to Moses: "I am who I am." (Exodus 3:14-15) John speaks of God the Father as the great, "I AM." This is a high and exalted title that speaks to the eternal nature and power of God.
 - 2. The #7: Notice already how often the number 7 is being used and will be used. Notice that it continually indicates or symbolizes 'fullness,' 'completion,' or 'perfection.' It often has literal and symbolic meaning and sometimes only symbolic meaning. There are literally 7 churches John is writing to, but they represent the fullness of the church.
- E. But this peace is not from the Father alone but from the Holy Spirit. When John mentions the 7 Spirits before the throne of the Father, he is alluding to Is. 11:2:
 - 1. "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. ² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD."
 - 2. So, John is not referring to angels or to 7 literal spirits, but to the Holy Spirit who is perfect.
 - 3. This is clearer when we note the Trinitarian formula of the greeting: Father, Holy Spirit, and Son together.
 - 4. Furthermore, this is an allusion to Zech. 4:2-7 where 7 lamps before God's throne are identified with the one Holy Spirit. Taken with what follows in v.12-20, we see the connection between the lamps, the Spirit, and the church/es.
- F. John finally mentions Christ to whom all glory belongs:
 - 1. Faithful witness: Here John is connecting Christ as a faithful witness to the Father amidst suffering unto death to himself as the witness of the revelation from Christ to the churches who are called to witness to Christ under persecution. Thus, Christ is the example of being faithful amidst suffering.
 - 2. Firstborn from the dead: Since Christ was faithful as a witness, God raised Him from the dead.
 - 3. Ruler of the kings of the earth: And God seated Him in heaven as king over all. We can take courage in suffering as witnesses with Christ as our example and with Christ as our savior who died for our sins so that we might be raised to new life as kings with Christ.

² Ibid., pg.186.

- G. John also mentions Christ's work done out of love for us:
 1. He freed us from our sins by his blood.
 2. He made us a kingdom, like Israel.
 3. He made us priests of God to the world, like Israel.
- H. John then ends the greeting with an announcement of the kingship of Christ seen in his coming return.
 1. John alludes to Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10 in verse 7.
 2. Daniel saw one like a son of man (that is, like a human) who rode on the clouds to heaven to receive all authority in heaven over the nations.
 3. Zechariah saw a Messianic figure anointed by the spirit who is wounded for Israel as the instrument of God to bring victory over the surrounding nations and lead Israel to repentance.
 4. These allusions emphasize the victory and authority of Christ over all opposition to the kingdom of God. It is meant to ensure the Christians that their God is king and will bring victory over their oppressors, for all eyes will see the return of the Son of Man, Christ.
 5. It is obvious from the passage that John is writing to encourage and comfort the church. He does so by showing that Christ is the Son of Man promised to Israel to bring repentance and salvation to God's people. This prophecy in Zechariah is being applied to the church which shows the priority of the New Testament and Christ in understanding the promises in the Old Testament.
 6. In verse 8, John repeats the threefold description of Christ that emphasizes His eternal nature and sovereignty over all things. A and W are the first and last letters of the alphabet and imply that God is over start to finish.
- I. Like the forward, John extends comfort to his readers by speaking the peace and grace of God upon the saints. He grounds this grace and peace in the eternal authority and power of God in Christ over all things. He also establishes the main theme of Revelation: the absolute sovereignty of Christ who will be victorious over all the enemies of God. This message is meant to bring comfort to the believers and is meant to drive them to faithful obedience in light of suffering.

V. The Commission and Vision: We can take comfort that the exalted Christ is present and among His church. (1.9-20)

Revelation 1:9-20 ⁹ I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account 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 a trumpet ¹¹ saying, "Write what you see in a book 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."

- A. John's vision of Jesus Christ which begins the main body of this book is meant to provide a framework under which the letters written to the churches should be understood. Jesus is seen as the divine ruler over the world and over the church. Thus, the churches should take comfort in knowing that the same Christ who rules the world also holds the church in His hand.³

³ Osborne, Grant. Revelation. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002, pg. 100.

- B. John's situation: John describes himself as a fellow sufferer in tribulation by mentioning his exile on the island of Patmos where Romans sent their prisoners and political dissenters. John says he was there because of his role as a witness, that is, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.
1. John also says that he is a fellow partner in the kingdom. Not only are Christians part of God's kingdom, but as we will see, we will share in the reign of Christ.
 2. John says that he was 'in the Spirit' 'on the Lord's day'.
 - a. 'in the Spirit' does not mean that he was having a charismatic experience, but that he was participating in the community of the Spirit. In Revelation, the work of the Spirit is linked to the community of the church as a whole, and thus John is saying essentially that he was participating in the gathered worship of the church.
 - b. 'on the Lord's day' almost certainly refers to Sunday as we have many documents from the early church speaking of Sunday in this way.
 3. The trumpets in Revelation and in the bible as a whole almost always relate to the Day of the Lord, where God comes in judgment and salvation to the earth. In the OT, the trumpet signaled war, heralded the king in coronation, and was used in cultic worship. The later two are most prominent in Revelation.
 4. Christ then speaks to John to tell him to write to the certain 7 churches.

¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. ¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. ¹⁹ Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. ²⁰ As for the mystery of the seven stars that 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.

- C. John then relates what he saw when he turned to see who spoke to him.
1. The 7 golden lampstands: The lampstands are symbols of the churches (v.20).
 - a. The allusion is also to Zechariah 4:2, where the lampstands in the temple before God's throne represents the reality that Israel is a light to the hostile world for YHWH.
 - b. So, the lampstands stand for the witness of God's people to the world, which fits with what John says in verse 20, that the lampstands are the 7 churches.
 - c. Since in the OT, these lampstands in the temple often represented the whole temple (in that the whole temple also was seen as a

- witness to the nations), the use of lampstands for the church here shows that the church is the new temple.
2. The Son of Man: The Son of Man is Christ amidst the churches who is related to the exalted son of man in Daniel 7 and 10. There are many allusions to various OT texts in these images.
 - a. Priestly imagery: long white robe, golden sash around the chest
 - b. Divine Kingly imagery: hair like wool as white as snow, a voice like mighty waters, a face like the shining sun, stars in right hand
 - c. Judge imagery: eyes like flames of fire, feet like burnished bronze, a double edged sword from his mouth
 - d. The overall picture is what is important. All the images must be taken together. The readers of this book originally would have seen the picture as a whole, noticing the various elements and blending them together so as to understand Christ here as the divine priest-king who holds judgment in his hand.
 3. The 7 stars: The stars are the seven churches represented by angels.
 - a. If you combine the imagery of Zech. 4, Dan. 12:3, and Revelation 1, we see that the lampstands, the stars, angels, and the churches are all being linked.
 - b. The best explanation is that the stars are angels, like guardian angels, which represent the heavenly nature of the church, and the lampstands represent the church on earth which is a witness of God to a hostile world as the new temple.
 - c. Thus, in the following chapters when John writes to the angel of each church, it is a heavenly personification of each church being addressed. The angel represents the church, and John personifies speaking to the church with the angel.
- E. The overall vision does not reveal what Jesus looks like but what He is. He is the risen Christ who is exalted over all but among his church, intimately in touch with its situation.
- F. The message of the Son of Man is: “FEAR NOT.” The reason John is not to fear is that He has died and been raised from the dead, and he now holds the authority over death and hell. He is the one who will judge and He is with, among, and holding in His hands the Church.

¹⁹ Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

- G. Verse 19: A key to the structure of this book?⁴
1. Chronological sequence view: This verse contains three phrases that suggest a straightforward chronological reading of Revelation.
 - a. *the things that you have seen* = this first vision in chapter 1
 - b. *those that are* = the letters to the churches at that time, chapters 2-3
 - c. *and those that are to take place after this* = future events, chapters 4-22
 - d. This view has problems because it doesn't take into account the symbolic nature of the book, interpreting everything too literally.

⁴ Beale, G.K. The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, pg.152-170.

Furthermore, it ignores the fact that much of chapters 4-22 refers to things in the past as well as the future.

2. Our view: This verse is a restatement of the command in verse 11. However, it does indicate the already-not yet nature of what is written in this book.
 - a. [the things that you have seen](#) = general restatement of verse 11
 - b. [those that are and those that are to take place after this](#) = describes the overall nature of the whole book, both present and future.
 - c. This view takes into account the allusion to Daniel 2 also seen in the very first verse of Revelation, discussed above.

VI. **Proposition:** Be at peace and take comfort, because we have been blessed with the knowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

- A. This passage introduces the main themes and message of the book of Revelation.
 1. Jesus Christ is the triumphant king who holds all authority and power in his hands.
 2. Jesus Christ understands our sufferings and trials and is present with us.
 3. We must persevere in faith and obedience in light of the coming kingdom.
 4. Jesus Christ is worthy of worship which results in witness to a hostile world.
- B. The world is hostile to Christ and His people: The Kingdom of Jesus Christ reigns over all, but it often doesn't seem this way. Wicked men and women gain political power. Legislation opposes what is good and right. Non-Christians persecute us with mocking and slander. Evil men attempt to hurt us and prey upon our fears. Our passage today reminds us that we cannot play power games with the world. All power and authority rests in the hands of our God, Jesus Christ. It is easy to slip into fear by seeking to gain power in the same way that the world does. It is easy to try and fight secularism with political power, tv advertisement, school curriculum, court rulings, and popular media. In the end, Christians are called to trust Christ and suffer. The Son of Man died and received power by the hand of God in His resurrection and exaltation. Our plight for power puts us in the camp of Satan. Our power is to be exercised through radical suffering faith. Jesus Christ sympathizes with our pain and weakness. He knows the trials and temptations we face, but He calls us to trust Him and to await His kingdom with lives of bold witness to a hostile world.