

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

The Village Church of Rancho Santa Fe

Winter 2010 – *La Costa Glen, Women’s Fellowship, Thursday Morning Men’s Study*

Lesson One – January 5, 6, 7

Revelation 1:1-20

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Sources:

- A. The Bible, New Revised Standard Translation
- B. M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1989
- C. Earl F. Palmer, *Revelation: The Communicator’s Commentary*, Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1982

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF REVELATION

1. Who?
 - a. John
 - i. The Apostle, Son of Zebedee, author of Gospel & Letters, or
 - ii. Palestinian Christian, refugee from wars of 66-70
 - b. A Christian leader, pastor, prophet
 - c. Exiled on Patmos, island in Aegean, colony used by Romans to banish all kinds of troublemakers
2. When?
 - a. 54-68, during reign of Nero
 - b. 69 – 72, around time of fall of Jerusalem
 - c. 81-96, during reign of Domitian
3. What?
 - a. A letter (not a “book” in our sense of the term)
 - b. Written to specific churches (those in Asia, modern day western Turkey)
 - c. Generally founded by Paul (and others?) in the 50’s
 - d. Meant to be read aloud in worship
 - Meant to be completely understood by its first hearers/readers
 - e. Later would become “canonical scripture” of the church
4. Why?
 - a. Written out of pastoral concern & leadership during a time of confusion, distress, persecution, and trouble

- b. Dynamics of the Crisis
 - i. Jewish & Jewish/Christian dispersion after wars of 66-70
 - ii. Tensions between Christians & Jews
 - iii. Tensions between Christians & Gentiles
 - iv. Christians as “minority within a minority”
 - v. Christians and Roman religion & cult
 - 1. Monotheistic vs. Polytheistic
 - 2. Jesus is Lord vs. Caesar is Lord
 - vi. Ostracism, fear, persecution – official and unofficial
 - c. Potential Responses to the Crisis
 - i. Quit the faith
 - ii. Lie about the faith
 - iii. Fight to change the system
 - iv. Change the Law
 - v. Adjust, Adapt, Accommodate
 - vi. Die
5. How?
- a. Apocalypse & Prophecy
 - b. Apocalypse
 - i. Well-known and often-used literary genre, social movement, and system of thought in ancient world, especially for Jews & Christians
 - ii. Characterized by: (Palmer)
 - 1. Revelation of that which is hidden
 - 2. Involving vast upheavals in the whole structure of the world
 - 3. Involving the decisive act of God
 - iii. Context:
 - 1. Human life in the difficult place at the intersection of the cosmic battle between God and Satan
 - 2. The End is Near – history is nearly over
 - iv. Holds that “God is guiding history to a final goal which God himself will bring about in the near future, in a particular way that is already revealed.” (Boring)
 - v. Answers Question: How is God faithful (or not) to those who—because of their faith—are not being blessed, but instead are being persecuted and even killed?
 - vi. Symbolism meant to be understood, not “code” language meant to confuse or hide
 - vii. Art, Image, Impression more than Proposition, Logic, Description
 - viii. Don’t let dazzling nature of language & image distract from important message about Christian discipleship (Palmer)
 - c. Prophecy
 - i. Also well-known, often-used form of communication

- ii. Speaks Word of God to specific situations in current time or immediate future
 - iii. Not about far-distant future unintelligible to first hearers/readers
 - iv. Originates in God's initiative to speak special word in particular moment to particular person
6. Issues of Understanding & Interpretation
- a. As canonical scripture, Revelation must be taken seriously
 - b. Revelation has long history of controversy, misuse, misunderstanding
 - c. Ways to Understand & Interpret (Boring)
 - i. Non-Historical – only poetic or idealistic
 - ii. Church-Historical – only about far away future
 - iii. End-Historical – concerns era just before final countdown of history and we are in that time (most common misunderstanding)
 - iv. Contemporary-Historical – concerns its own day and time first, and our day and time second
 - d. “[W]hile Revelation does not speak *about* our time, it does speak *to* it.” (Boring)

REVELATION 1:1-20 – The Text

Chapter 1, Verses 1-3

1. Introduction & Salutation – as in a letter
2. Revelation is about Jesus Christ
3. Jesus is the key link between God and Humanity
4. Through Jesus, a new message is given
5. John is the human mediator of the message, a fellow Christian, a witness to Jesus, the one who received the message from God's angel (literally, messenger)
6. Blessed are those who hear/read: blessed in sense of “knowing the right pathway”

Chapter 1, Verses 4-8

1. Body of the Letter
2. Seven Churches – Real churches in real places in real time
3. Grace & Peace – theological affirmation about God's gift (grace) of wholeness (peace)
4. God – the “I Am”
5. Seven Spirits – the Holy Spirit?
6. Jesus – Alpha/Omega, Witness, Firstborn, Ruler – old and new terms of Jesus' identity
7. Doxology – praise to Triune God who loves, frees, commissions his Church
8. Affirmation: One day (soon?) the whole world will see and know the person and power of the Risen Christ

Chapter 1, Verses 9-20

1. John, fellow Christian, witness of Jesus, persecuted, exiled on Patmos

2. In the Spirit
 - a. At worship, or
 - b. Chosen by God to receive special spiritual knowledge
3. Lord's Day – Sunday, Resurrection Day
4. Voice "like" a trumpet – we are in the realm of that which can only be described in approximate, provisional, imagistic terms
5. Seven Churches – a message from God & Christ
6. A Vision of the Risen Christ – This is who is speaking...so listen!
 - a. All images from Scripture or other known religions
 - b. Long Robe – priestly garment
 - c. Golden Girdle – emblem of the king
 - d. White Hair – Ancient of Days
 - e. Feet/Bronze & Voice/Waters – heavenly messenger of Daniel
 - f. Seven Stars
 - i. Mithras Religion & Caesar Cult
 - ii. Jesus "holds" them – controls them!
 - g. 2-Edged Sword
 - i. Word of God that Creates all things (Genesis)
 - ii. Word that will create New World
7. Awesome & Comforting Christ
 - a. He *was* dead (as you, 1st century Christians, may also be soon)
 - b. He *is* alive (as you, 1st century Christians, will also be one day, with Christ)
8. Lampstands – Church is the Bearer of Christ's light to the world
9. John's Job – to communicate the "mystery" – the new information from the Church's Risen and Living Lord

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are your fears, concerns, hopes, and plans as you study Revelation?
2. How can you personally relate to Christians who are powerless, persecuted, poor, facing the loss of their jobs, status, and even their lives?
3. As a book about Jesus Christ and his triumph (already accomplished and yet to be fully realized), how does Revelation speak to your own troubles and concerns today?
4. What images, dreams, or impressions of God and Christ (from Revelation, from your own experience, or from elsewhere) are helpful and meaningful to you?
5. Revelation pictures Christ as an awesome and also comforting Lord. How do you see and know Jesus in both these ways?
6. What truths from God (prophecies) do you think need most to be heard in the world today?
7. What things have you learned about Revelation today that are new or different from what you have previously been taught?