

TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY

Revelation 1:1-3

I like stories with happy endings, don't you? This old world is in a desperate condition. It's a dark picture that we often see on the nightly news or read in the newspaper. The good guys seem to be losing.

I've got some good news for you this morning. There is a book in the Bible called the Revelation, and it tells us how this world is going to end. And you know what? It's going to work out all right. The reason I know this is because I've been reading this book. And I hope that you will read it and study it with me over these next several weeks as we make our way through this tremendous book of the bible.

What do we know about the book of Revelation? It is probably one of the least read and least understood books of the bible. Ironically, the word translated "revelation" simply means "unveiling." In this book, the Holy Spirit pulls back the curtain and gives us the privilege of seeing the glorified Christ in heaven and the fulfillment of His sovereign purposes in the world. In other words, Revelation is an *open* book in which God reveals His plans and purposes to His church.¹

Who wrote the book of Revelation? God Himself is the author of all Holy Scripture. However, the human author of this book identifies himself in Revelation 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8 as John. Who is this John whom the Lord chose to be the instrument of His revelation? The testimony of the early church fathers and the evidence of the scripture itself leaves little doubt the penman of Revelation was in fact John the Apostle. It was probably written sometime around AD 95 when John was in exile on the isle of Patmos during the reign of Domitian.

Why Revelation? Why now? First of all because it's in the bible. As a pastor I am commanded to preach the whole counsel of God. Second, because the message of this book is very timely. Third, because it presents one of the greatest testimonies to the majesty, the glory, the power of the Lord Jesus Christ in all of scripture.

I. The Composition of the Book of Revelation.

When you start out on a long journey it's essential of course to know where you are going and how you are going to get there, but it's also helpful to know what to expect along the way. The Lord has graciously given us a roadmap of Revelation right here in the first chapter of the book. Look at Revelation 1:19 with me. Verse 19 gives us an outline for the entire book of Revelation.

First of all, the book of Revelation commences with **a vision of the glorified Christ**. "*Write the things which you have seen.*" That is what we have here in chapter 1. Over the next two weeks we are going to consider this incredible vision of the Lord Jesus Christ that was given to John. It's going to be exciting. I can't wait to share with you this magnificent portrait of our wonderful Lord and Savior.

The book of Revelation continues in chapters 2 and 3 with **a vision of the Church Age**. Notice again in verse 19 that John is instructed to write of "*The things which are.*" This is the day in which we are living. This is the time in which Christ is calling out a people for His own called the church. The church age began on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit fell upon those first believers and will conclude with the rapture of the church.

The book of Revelation concludes with a **vision of the consummation of history**. The angel of the Lord tells John to write of *"The things which will take place after this,"* which is what we find in chapters 4 thru 22.

This will be a time of tribulation and triumph. It begins with the rapture of the church (Revelation 4:1). Then comes the great Tribulation (Revelation 6:1-18:24). This is followed by the Second Coming of Christ (Revelation 16:12-16; 19:17-21). Christ then reigns on earth for a period of 1000 years (Revelation 20:1-16). Then comes the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15). Finally, there is the creation of a new heaven and new earth in which God's people will live forever.

II. The Characteristics of the Book of Revelation.

Revelation is a book that uses **symbolic language**.

Look again at verse 1. *"And He sent and signified it by his angel to his servant John."* Do you see the word "signified"? The word translated "signified" in verse 1 comes from the root word sign, or symbol. The book of Revelation is a series of visions expressed in symbols which deal with reality.²

We are to interpret Revelation both symbolically and literally. Like all apocalyptic literature the book of Revelation is filled with symbolism, but the symbolism in this blessed book is to be taken literally. You see, the use of symbols does not negate a literal interpretation. Let me give you an example. Turn with me to Revelation 12:7-9. *"And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him."* Let me ask you a question; is the dragon described here meant to be understood in a literal sense or is the dragon symbolic of something else? The dragon is a symbol, isn't it? What's it a symbol of? Satan. How do we know that? Verse 9 tells us *"So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan."* Is Satan to be taken literally? Absolutely!

The late Dr. Adrian Rogers said, "The key to the proper interpretation and application of Revelation is to find the truth that the symbol stands for and then literally believe it".³ That is an extremely important principle to keep in mind as you read and study the book of Revelation.

Revelation is a book filled with **significant sevens**.

There are seven "golden lampstands" - Chapter 1.

There are seven "stars" - Chapter 1.

There are seven "churches" - Chapters 2-3.

There are seven "seals" - Chapters 5-6.

There are seven "trumpets" - Chapters 8-11.

There are seven "bowls of wrath" - Chapter 16.

There are seven "beatitudes" - Revelation 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14.

Revelation is a book that presents a **striking contrast**.

There are many contrasts between this last book of the bible and the first book. In Genesis the earth is created, in Revelation the earth passes away; in Genesis we see the entrance of sin, in Revelation we see the exodus of sin; in Genesis paradise is lost, in Revelation paradise is regained; in Genesis the curse of sin is pronounced, in Revelation the curse of sin is removed; in Genesis we see Satan's victory, in Revelation we see Satan's defeat; in Genesis death enters the world, in Revelation death is eliminated; in Genesis man is banished from the tree of life, in Revelation man is blessed with free access to the tree of life; in Genesis we see the marriage of the first Adam, in Revelation we see the marriage of the last Adam.

Revelation is a book that promises a **special blessing**.

Look at verse 3. *“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.”*

If you want to be blessed read the bible. Listen to the words of the Palmist in Psalm 1. *“Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper”* (Psalm 1:1-3). I will make you a promise this morning. If you will dedicate yourself to the study of God’s Holy Word and you will be blessed. Your mind will be enlightened, your heart will be encouraged, and your life will be enriched. However, of all the books of the bible this is the only one that includes a specific blessing for those who read it, hear it, and keep it.

Verse 3 says, *“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy.”* The verb *“read”* literally means “to read out loud.” The Apostle John sent one book or letter to seven different churches. We will learn more about those seven churches when we get to chapters 2 and 3. When this divine revelation recorded by John on the Isle of Patmos was received it was read aloud in local church meetings so that every believer could hear it. The one who had the privilege of standing before the church and reading the Word of God was blessed. All those who had the privilege of hearing the Word of God were blessed as well. However, the Lord’s promise of special blessing here in verse 3 is not for the one who reads this book or those who hear the words of this book.

Look again at verse 3. John writes, *“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, (now, don’t miss this) and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.”* If you want to receive the full measure of God’s blessing from this book you must not only hear it, and read it, and study it, you must also keep it. What does that mean? Simply put, it means you must practice what it says.

James reminds us that the blessings of God’s Word come to us not just by *hearing it*, but even more so by *doing*.

James 1:22 says *“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.*

But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:22-25).

Revelation 1:3 promises that if you will let the eternal truths of this book get into your head, into your heart, and into your life you will be blessed.

Revelation is a book that contains a **specific warning**.

Turn with me to the very last chapter of Revelation, chapter 22. Look at verse 18. *“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18-19).*

I want every one of you to hold up your bibles. What a beautiful sight that is. That book you hold in your hand is the Word of God. It is living. It is powerful. It is perfect. It is divine. The bible tells us that *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16)*. Every verse of scripture is God-breathed. When we open the pages of this blessed book called the Revelation of Jesus Christ we are on holy ground. Dear church, the same could be said of every verse, chapter and book of the bible. Now, we are not worship the Word of God. That would be idolatry. We are to worship the God who has given us His Word. However, it is absolutely imperative that we approach the Word of God with reverence, being certain that we always hold a high view of Holy Scripture, and careful that we never add to or take away from its message.

III. The Central Theme of the Book of Revelation.

This book is *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ"* (Revelation 1:1a). Jesus is the central theme and chief subject of the book. While this book reveals a great many divine truths, above all else the book of Revelation reveals the majesty and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me share with you this wonderful quote from Dr. McGee. "In the Revelation the Lamb is the center around which all else is clustered, the foundation upon which everything lasting is built, the nail on which all hangs, the object to which all points, and the spring from which all blessings proceeds. The Lamb is the light, the glory, the life, the Lord of heaven and earth, from whose face all defilement must flee away, and in whose presence fullness of joy is known. Hence we cannot go far in the study of the Revelation without seeing the Lamb. Like direction posts along the road to remind us that He, who did by Himself purge our sins, is now highly exalted and that to Him every knee must bow and every tongue confess."⁴

This isn't the only revelation of Jesus Christ in the bible. Christ is revealed in one way or another in all 66 books of the bible. In the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John we see Christ revealed as the suffering Savior. He is the Lamb of God, meek and lowly, who willingly dies on a cross as a sacrifice for man's sin. In Revelation we see Christ revealed as the righteous Judge and conquering King. He is still the Lamb of God, but now we see Him in all of His glory and power as He comes to bring judgment upon the earth and to reign over His kingdom.

Conclusion,

Revelation is the climax of the Bible. All that began in Genesis will be completed and fulfilled in

keeping with God's sovereign will. What God starts, He finishes! Jesus Christ came to earth nearly 2000 years ago. Because of His love for you, He suffered, bled, and died, to pay the debt of your sin. He gave His life that you might gain life, eternal and abundant. Have you trusted Jesus Christ as the Savior and Lord of your life?

The book of Revelation tells us that the Messiah, the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ will come again some day. I want you to know that the Messiah does not reside at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave in Washington D.C. He is seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven. When He returns He will not arrive in a long, black limousine surrounded by agents of the Secret Service. The bible tells us that the Savior will sweep down from heaven on a white horse escorted by an army of saints. Jesus is coming soon. The Lord told John in verse 1 that *“the time is near”* for His return (Rev. 1:3). Christ’s coming will bring both triumph and tragedy. For those who know the Lord, His return will be the ultimate triumph. For those who have never received Jesus as their Savior, His coming will indeed bring about the greatest of all tragedies. Which will it be for you?

1. Dr. Warren Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary - New Testament*
2. J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible Commentary, Vol. 5* (Thru The Bible Radio, Pasadena, CA 91109) p. 880.
3. Quote from the late Dr. Adrian Rogers, Pastor, Bellview Baptist Church, Memphis, TN.
4. J. Vernon McGee quoting Snell, *Thru The Bible Commentary, Vol. 5* (Thru The Bible Radio, Pasadena, CA 91109) p. 882.