

# Blessed Are Those: A Journey Through Revelation – Part 1

## Introduction to Revelation – Rev. 1:1-18

Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – Jan. 5<sup>th</sup>, 2025

### Intro:

- This morning, we are starting our 21-week journey through the book of Revelation. Some of you are super excited that we are going to go through this book, while others of you are apprehensive and dreading that we are going through this book.
- Truth be told, I have never taught through this book in 30 years of ministry. Like most pastors, I have taught through the 7 churches and just ignored most of the rest of the book until the last chapters, and have quoted and referenced those passages many, many times. We typically do this because we have not been taught well. There is a wide range of opinions on this book, there are things that are difficult to understand and even comprehend, and we are not really sure what to do with it or how helpful it will be. Some people are passionate that their interpretation is the right one and will vigorously disagree with anyone who thinks differently.
- However, I believe, and the other shepherds agree, that now is the time that God is leading our church to go through this book. We live in an increasingly dangerous and disorienting time. Christians have trouble figuring out our role in this society; in politics and the social concerns of our day. We are increasingly dismissed and despised. What we believe is criticized and believers are pressured more and more. We need to know how to keep our balance, our faith in Jesus, under this increasing pressure.
- Because of this, I have been spending a lot of time prepping for this series and feel much more prepared to go through this book. I am convinced that God will use our time in Revelation to deepen and mature our faith, empower our resolve to persevere, and help us to love, treasure, honor and adore Jesus more. I trust that our awe of God will increase, which in turn will produce worship and wonder of God all the more. God promises to bless us if we go through this book, and I want us all to gain that blessing.
- This is why we have entitled this series “Blessed Are Those: A Journey Through Revelation.” At the beginning and the end and throughout this book, we will encounter seven statements that pronounce and promise blessing:
  - Revelation 1:3 “**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.”
  - Revelation 14:13 “And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this: **Blessed** are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘**Blessed** indeed,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!’”
  - Revelation 16:15 “Behold, I am coming like a thief! **Blessed** is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”
  - Revelation 19:9 “And the angel said to me, ‘Write this: **Blessed** are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the true words of God.’”
  - Revelation 20:6 “**Blessed** and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.”
  - Revelation 22:7 “And behold, I am coming soon. **Blessed** is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”
  - Revelation 22:14 “**Blessed** are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.”

- In this series, we are not going to cover every verse in the book of Revelation, nor are we going to answer all the questions you have. I still have questions about some things. This is why we have recommended some books to you: (*Blessed: Experiencing the Promise of the Book of Revelation* by Nancy Guthrie, *Discipleship on the Edge: An Expository Journey through the Book of Revelation* by Darrel W. Johnson, and *40 Questions About the End Times* by Eckhard Schnabel. Also, there are Bible Project overview videos on the book of Revelation ([www.bibleproject.com](http://www.bibleproject.com) – links sent out in this week’s crosspoint connection), and there are other good and helpful books out there.
- Even if we don’t understand every detail, the good news is that we can grasp and grow in our understanding of the central message and the key themes of the book of Revelation. The central message of the book is that **God is sovereign over history and will ultimately triumph over all evil through Jesus Christ, bringing eternal victory, justice, and restoration to His people.** It encourages believers to persevere in faith despite trials, persecution, and the power of evil forces, assuring them that Christ’s victory is certain, and His kingdom will reign forever.
- The key themes of the central message that are important for us to understand are:
  - *God’s Sovereignty* - Revelation emphasizes that God is in control, seated on His throne (Revelation 4-5). No matter how chaotic the world appears, everything unfolds according to His plan.
  - *The Victory of Christ* - Jesus, depicted as the Lamb who was slain yet lives (Revelation 5:6), is the central figure in the book. His death and resurrection secured victory over sin, Satan, and death.
  - *Judgment and Justice* - Revelation reveals God’s righteous judgment on sin and the vindication of His people. Evil empires, symbolized by Babylon, will fall, and Satan will be defeated (Revelation 20).
  - *Perseverance of the Saints* - Believers are called to endure hardship, remain faithful to Christ, and resist compromise, with the promise of eternal life as their reward (Revelation 2-3).
  - *The New Creation* - The book culminates with a vision of the new heaven and new earth where God dwells with His people, wiping away every tear and eradicating death, pain, and sorrow forever (Revelation 21-22).
  - *Hope and Worship* - Revelation inspires hope and worship, calling believers to focus on God’s glory and the certainty of His ultimate victory, even in the face of suffering.
- The book of Revelation proclaims the ultimate victory of God through Christ, offering hope and encouraging believers to remain faithful as they await the fulfillment of God’s promises.
- Revelation is actually less about *when* Jesus will return and more about *what* we are to do, *who* we are to be, and *what* we can expect to endure as we wait for Jesus to return and establish His kingdom. (Guthrie, 14). We need to replace an unhealthy fascination with the future with a determination to follow Jesus in the present.
- The first servants of Jesus who heard what is written in Revelation were believers around Asia in the first century. They were undergoing great persecution and pressure from the Roman government. John himself was exiled as a prisoner to an island called Patmos where he saw this vision and wrote this letter. It was exactly what they needed to hear in their day. But it wasn’t just what *they* needed to hear. John wrote it down for every believer in every century since then. It has always been exactly what true believers need to hear, the reality believers need to see. Nancy Guthrie poetically said that this letter was written to show us:
  - *The opposition we can expect to escalate*
  - *The endurance we need to cultivate*

- *The judgment we will celebrate*
- *The victory in which we will participate*
- *The enemy Jesus will annihilate*
- *The sorrow He will alleviate*
- *The creation He will regenerate*
- *The marriage He will consummate*
- *And the home we can anticipate – sharing with Him forever.*
- Now, in the book of Revelation, there are some puzzling images to make sense of. Here's some more good news: what makes these images understandable is that much of the imagery comes straight from the Old Testament. But what is interesting about that is that Revelation doesn't contain a single Old Testament quote. Yet, it has more allusions to the books of the Old Testament than any other book in the Bible. Imagine there were blue letter hyperlinks throughout this book on certain words and phrases, linking back to the OT. Every page would be full of blue! You understand the meaning of Revelation by reading the Old Testament and hearing how it deals with the imagery.
- Also, note that John is writing down what he "saw." This revelation is not always in chronological or sequential order. For example, the seven seals, trumpets, and bowls all see the same thing but from three different angles or vantage points (like three different camera angles at a sporting event). They are not in chronological order, one following another. There are a lot of images that represent things, like in political cartoons. In our time, an elephant and a donkey represent political parties and the images in the book of Revelation function the same way. Numbers in the book of Revelation are important as well as they represent various things. For instance, the number 7 represents completeness, perfection, or salvation. And that number is seen all over the book and the whole book can be laid out in seven sets of seven.
  - *Prologue (1:1-3)*
    1. *Seven churches (1:4-3:22)*
    2. *Seven seals (4:1-8:5)*
    3. *Seven trumpets (8:6-11:19)*
    4. *Seven great signs (12:1-15:4)*
    5. *Seven bowls of wrath (15:1-16:22)*
    6. *Seven messages of final judgment (17:1-18:24)*
    7. *Seven last things (19:1-22:5)*
  - *Epilogue (22:6-20)*
- Another thing to keep in mind when we are reading apocalyptic books and passages from the Bible, as Darrell Johnson put it:

*Apocalyptic [Literature] seeks to do two things: first, it seeks to set the present in light of the unseen realities of the future. For if we know what the future holds it determines the choices we make in the present. Second, and more importantly, it seeks to set the present in light of the invisible realities of the present. The fundamental conviction of apocalyptic literature is that "things are not as they seem;" there is more to reality than meets the unaided eyes or ears; there is more to the present historical moment than we can deduce. And apocalyptic writing seeks to unveil that unseen reality of the present, to pull back the curtain on the present so that we see what is really going on.*
- Okay, I know that was a super long introduction, but we need to understand these things before we jump into this book and the text for this morning. So, here is the first point of today's passage. In order to understand our place as Christians in this turbulent world now and in the future, here's where we start.

## **Behold the unveiling from Jesus Christ**

### **Rev 1:1-2 NIV**

**The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.**

- The Greek word translated as “revelation” means to unveil, uncover, or disclose something previously hidden. So, this book is a “revelation” an “unveiling” of what is soon to take place. This revelation was given by God to Jesus Christ, who sent His angel to John so that John could testify to everything he saw. What he saw was the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.
- God sent this to His “servants,” which is plural. This letter is sent to all people at all times who follow and serve God. This letter was intended for The Church, and there is meaning for the entire church for this entire season between the ascension and return of Christ. The phrase “what must soon take place” is a relative term from the perspective of eternity. It is good for us to remember that for the Lord, “a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like a day” (2 Peter 3:8). Some of the things in this book have taken place, some are taking place, and some are yet to come.
- So, the first thing we are to do is to behold what God is revealing to us, to see it, and to know that He is working in all things and that all things hold together in Him. History will end with His victory, and He is reigning and will continue to reign over it all. His word is the last and final word. Nothing is outside of His grasp, and all things will give an account to Him. Knowing this helps us to live for Him and in Him and gives us confidence and courage to continue to persist and persevere in following Him. Knowing these things strengthens and perfects our faith and faithfulness.
- The next thing we are to do when reading this book is to gain the promise of the blessing.

## **Gain the promise of the blessing**

### **Rev 1:3 NIV**

**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.**

- Blessed, happy, and fortunate are the ones who read this and read it aloud. Why read it aloud? Because doing so stirs up our imagination. We imagine these things in our minds, and in doing so, we remember them better. At the end of this series, we are planning a Sunday night to read this book out loud in its entirety; we will have more information for you in the future.
- Not only are we to read these words, but we are to take them to heart. If you hide these images and truths in your heart, they will help you to live, to build your faith, and to know what is to come. They will inform and fill your faith. They will give you understanding and perspective to persevere. They will give you comfort and steadfastness in the certainty of what is to come and help you overcome the trials and temptations, the deceivers, and the powers of this age.
- And again, we read that the “time is near,” meaning that through the lens of eternity, the culmination of these things is at the door. We are blessed to see them, to know them, and to keep them in our hearts.
- The third thing we need to do while reading this book is to see the splendor of God.

## **See the splendor of God**

### **Rev 1:4-5a NIV**

**John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.**

- Here, we see John address this revelation to the “seven churches in the province of Asia.” These were real churches—real congregations. But we know there were more than seven churches in this area and way more than seven churches in the world at that time. So, using the number 7 is the way of saying that this letter is written to the church as a whole and to Christians for all time everywhere. In chapters 2-3 he will have particular messages for these churches and to the church of all times and all ages.
- God Himself is offering us grace and peace, and this is from the one “who is, and who was, and who is to come.” This is grace and peace that come from beyond us and before us, from the one who has all power and dominion. The perfect Holy Spirit gives us this grace and peace as well, as He is in us, is everywhere, and is simultaneously before the throne of God.
- And this grace and peace come from Jesus Christ. John describes some of His titles:
  - Jesus is the faithful witness, which means we can trust that Jesus will tell us the truth about all things—about ourselves, about our world, about the future, about the spirit world. He is the faithful witness, and what He says is true.
  - Jesus is the firstborn of the dead. He is the first to be resurrected, and He will not be the last. Because He lives, we will also live; He is the first, and we will join Him in the final resurrection.
  - Jesus is the ruler of the kings of the earth which means that governments, organizations, and the powers that be are all under Him. Their days are numbered, and He will rule eternally.
  - Grab hold of this great reassurance—this comfort. Our world, our country, our city is in turmoil. It often seems godless; dangerous for we who profess Christ. But God himself, through Jesus Christ, has guaranteed his “grace and peace” – gifts we do not deserve, and peace that passes all understanding
- John then goes on to describe Jesus and to praise Him.

### **Rev 1:5b-6 NIV**

**To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 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.**

- This revelation is coming from one who loves us. He is committed and connected to us out of love. This love is a powerful force that will never let us go. He has freed us from sins—from the power and penalty of our sins—by giving His life and shedding His blood for us. All out of love.
- Not only did He free us from something, but He also freed us for something. He freed us from our power and penalty of our sins so that we can be a kingdom of people, of priests, who can draw near to him to know and to serve God the Father. To Him be the glory and power forever and ever! We praise Him by giving Him our glory and serving him with our power. He is worthy of it all!
- And then John tells us to “look.”

## **Rev 1:7-8 NIV**

**“Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.” So shall it be! 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.”**

- Jesus will come back with the clouds, just as He said He would (Mark 13:26) and as prophesied in Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10. All people will see Him, and no one will miss this. It will not be a secret. All who are currently on the earth at that time and all who have ever lived will see Him. This will happen, and nothing and no one will be able to stop His return because He is the beginning and end, the Almighty.
- As Nancy Guthrie puts it “Finally, God identifies himself as ‘the Almighty’ (1:8). God reveals Himself to a people who may have wondered if He was aware of their suffering, if they should really put their lives on the line for the gospel. If they were risking everything for something that wasn’t real or true. He reminds them of His name, a name that reflects the reality that He has the power and position to control everything. Oppressive governments are under His control. False teachers are under His control. Evil is under His control. The suffering of His saints is under His control. The destruction of the devil is under His control. Time is under His control. The earth and stars are under His control. Everything is under His control because He is not just mighty; He is the Almighty.”

## **Conclusion**

- I hope you walk away from this message and this passage today better equipped to understand and read the book of Revelation. I hope you understand and see God more clearly, that your confidence in the person and work of Christ is more firm, and that your commitment to follow, serve, and praise Him is empowered. May we all find blessing in reading and taking to heart the words of this prophecy.

## **Discussion questions for growth groups**

1. What are your initial thoughts and feelings about studying the book of Revelation? Are you excited, apprehensive, or curious? Why do you feel that way?
2. The message emphasized that Revelation is less about predicting when Jesus will return and more about how we need to live faithfully now. How can this perspective shape the way you approach the book and your faith journey?
3. Revelation 1:3 highlights the blessing for those who read, hear, and take to heart the words of this prophecy. What steps can we take as individuals and as a group to “take to heart” the message of Revelation?
4. The introduction described key themes such as God’s sovereignty, Christ’s victory, and the perseverance of the saints. Which of these themes resonates most with you right now, and why?
5. In Revelation 1:7-8, we are reminded that Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, the Almighty. How does reflecting on Jesus as the beginning and the end impact your trust in His control over the challenges in your life?
6. The sermon discussed how Revelation unveils unseen realities of the present and future. How does this perspective challenge or encourage you in facing trials or uncertainties?
7. One takeaway from the message was to “see the splendor of God” and grow in awe and worship. What is one way you can cultivate a greater sense of awe and wonder for God this week?