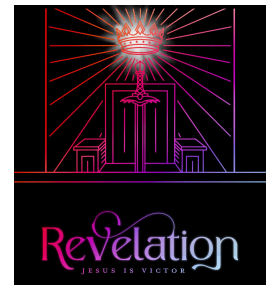


Anticipation

Revelation 1:1-3

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



Revelation is a book that, for many Christians, elicits one of two responses, an eager reader to figure out how “it is all going to happen” or resistance and dismissal because of poor teaching or its confusing content. Let’s be honest Revelation is not an easy book of the Bible to read, let alone study and apply to our lives. Martin Luther once expressed his distaste for it by saying, “Finally, let everyone think of it as his own spirit leads him. My spirit cannot accommodate itself to this book. For me this is reason enough not to think highly of it: Christ is neither taught nor known in it. But to teach Christ, this is the thing.”¹ Yet, this mysterious book of the Bible will begin by telling us that if you read it, you will be blessed (1:3). Why is that? Well, as we will come to see, Revelation is to foster hope in us as it increases our anticipation for the things of God and his final act in the scope of redemptive history. God delights in our holy anticipation of what he will do in our lives and in the scope of human history. But the blessing or the gift of anticipation in God’s economy is not that we are filled with a fantastical wish. It is that our anticipation grows proportionally with our hope because we see God at work in our lives and in the most difficult of circumstances. We want to know that it is going to be ok. We want to know that it is going to work out. We are no different than the generations before us or the original audience in that way. To this need and to a culture and humanity wrapped in fear, God speaks to us through Revelation. He desires our holy anticipation because **anticipation increases hope... hope fosters faithfulness.**

1. Let’s set the stage.

- a. How to read Revelation responsibly.
 - i. The Book of Revelation is not about who and what’s new, but *what’s always been true*? **It’s not about explaining timelines but learning transforming principles. Not secret codes and hidden messages, but timeless truths and amazing promises that have blessed the church for 2000 years.**
 - ii. We will avoid the “Bible in one hand, news feed in the other hand” approach that has dominated a lot of teaching in the US for the last 50 years or so.
 - 1. I.e., You will need your Bible and an open heart and mind. You will not need a secret decoder ring or some secret knowledge to really unlock the meaning of the text.
 - iii. This is a letter – That means that John is writing to address the specific situation that the original audience has found themselves.
 - 1. The letter also falls into a larger genre that we find in the OT specifically, apocalyptic literature.

¹ Dr. Michael Cooper, A Faithful Witness (Ephesiology Press, 2021), 19.

- a. But normally an apocalypse purports to be a revelation made by some celestial personage (like an angel) to a great figure of the past (such as Abraham or Moses or Ezra). The message is usually expressed in vivid symbolism, sometimes of a bizarre kind. It appears in difficult times and conveys the author's profound conviction that the troubles in which his readers find themselves are not the last word.²
 - b. This is a genre that we are not as familiar with as an audience.
 - c. Here is a great overview of this genre:
<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/apocalyptic-literature/>
 - d. The point of this genre is to make something clear that is unclear.
 - i. This is what God is doing here, he is bringing clarity to human history from a divine perspective.
 - ii. I.e., **A heavenly perspective on an earthly situation.**
 - e. Daniel is filled with this type of genre. → In fact, Jesus' self-claimed title (Son of Man) comes directly from Daniel 7. And, here in Rev. 1,
 - f. Symbols – Often Biblical authors assume that the reader is able to understand what the symbols meant. Other times, they tell the audience directly what the symbols meant.
 - i. Because we are unfamiliar with the genre and are so far removed from the original setting, we need to employ an intellectual humility as we read this letter.
2. **The very first word of this book, *apokalypsis*** (translated *The revelation*), sets the stage. The word means the uncovering of something hidden, the making known of what we could not find out for ourselves.³
- a. It is Jesus' revelation and that of no-one else that we are to read. And it came from God the Father. It is not a human, or even an angelic production.
3. **What is intellectual humility, and how do we employ it?**
- a. Intellectual humility is a posture that does not think too much of my abilities, and instead leans into the voices of those closer to the context.
 - b. The first step in employing it, is to keep the main thing the main thing.
- b. **Keep the main thing... The main thing. (A quick lesson in hermeneutics.)**
- i. **A text without a context, is a pre-text for a proof-text.**⁴ - This is a core hermeneutical principle for good Bible study and reading.
 - 1. I.e., **The text cannot mean something to us today, that it did not mean to the original audience.**
 - 2. So, we look for the melodic line (main idea) of the book and always... and I mean always use that to help us work through the hard stuff within the text.

² Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 25.

³ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 51.

⁴ I first heard this in a preaching co-lab at TIU. It originates from "Exegetical Fallacies" by D.A. Carson. "Exegetical Fallacies" was originally recommended to me by a professor after I gave my first sermon in my initial preaching co-lab. He started off his comments with several positive notes, and then said, "About your text work, you might want to consider this resource." It was a slice of humble pie! LOL!

- a. This is another hermeneutical principle – We let the easy interpret the hard. Or, in other words, we work from clear to unclear, and the unclear cannot contradict the clear.
- b. **What is the melodic line? → Jesus is the victor.**
 - i. Chap 5 has been said to be the key section in interpreting Revelation. It is the chapter that we come to see Jesus who is seated on the right-hand side of the Father, is the slain lamb.
 - ii. **⁶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. (Rev. 5:6)**
 - 1. **The implication of both proclamations in their contexts is that no created being, only God, possesses the worthiness and authority to be sovereign over history and to be able to execute his cosmic plan.⁵**
 - iii. We will get to chapter five in a few weeks, but even as we start, it becomes a helpful lens for us to ren everything through.
- ii. **How should we understand the timeline of Revelation?**
 - 1. **Today People often identify four ways in which Revelation can be read:**
 - a. **Preterist**—Revelation describes events in the first century.
 - b. **Historicist**—Revelation forecasts world history from Christ onwards.
 - c. **Futurist**—Revelation forecasts future events just before and after Christ's return.
 - d. **Idealist**—Revelation portrays timeless principles which are true of any era.
 - 2. None of these approaches quite capture the sophistication of what John is doing. **John is drawing on the Old Testament prophetic critique of economic injustice, imperial power and idolatrous claims, and reapplying that critique to his day.** In so doing, he gives us a model that we can and should follow in our day.⁶
 - 3. We must not suppose that John on Patmos thought he was predicting events in sixteenth-century Britain and the twenty-first-century Middle East. **He wrote to address the experiences faced by his readers. But, like John and generations of Christians before us, we should apply the prophetic critique of imperial and idolatrous power to the particular challenges we face today in our context.⁷**
 - a. I.e., We are to resist the idea that John was some sort of first-century Nostradamus.
- iii. **What is the setting?**
 - 1. The revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:1) was probably written by the apostle John while in exile on the island of Patmos, off the coast of present-day Turkey. It was addressed to seven actual churches.⁸
 - 2. John is writing to Christians facing the threats and seductions of life in and under the Roman Empire. We need to put ourselves in their shoes and see how Revelation inspires them to remain faithful to Christ before we apply it to ourselves.⁹

⁵ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 338.

⁶ Chester, Tim. Revelation For You: Seeing history from heaven's perspective (p. 8). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

⁷ Chester, Tim. Revelation For You: Seeing history from heaven's perspective (p. 9). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

⁸ If you have a study Bible, you will likely find this note at the beginning of Revelation.

⁹ Chester, Tim. Revelation For You: Seeing history from heaven's perspective (p. 7). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

3. **Emperor Worship** – This is a key aspect to the world that John is writing into. Paying taxes and observing the laws of the Roman Empire were not simply observing rules and giving the government its due. They were actions that were connected to the perceived “divinity” of the ruling emperor. This is a far cry from the world that we live in currently in America.
 4. Roman coins were inscribed with “PON MAX”, which stands for “Pontifex Maximus” or “Greatest Priest”. The title denoted the position of emperor as the head of the state religion. One hundred years earlier in 29 BC, a delegation from Asia Minor had asked permission to set up a cult to worship Caesar. **Although Augustus, the Caesar at the time, refused, he did allow a cult devoted to the god of Roma (which included a temple with his statue).** It was the start of an imperial cult that grew over time. **When Augustus died, the Roman Senate voted to deify him, and so his son, Tiberius (emperor during the ministry of Jesus) was called “the son of God”.** The Emperors also began to be known as “the savior of the world”, “the lord” and “benefactor” (Mark 10:42). A generation later the Emperor Caligula proclaimed the “good news” that he had been deified and, because he was so feared, no one objected.¹⁰
- iv. How does Revelation progress as a letter?
1. It will use repetition to make its central point... Only Jesus is worthy – Only Jesus has the victory.
 2. Revelation is a drama in two acts. **The first half of the book (Revelation 1–11) takes readers from the valleys and hills of Asia Minor to the heights of heaven, where choruses of praise resound in the halls of God’s heavenly throne room.** The thundering hoofbeats of the four horsemen and visions of the collapse of the universe, with stars falling from heaven and ghoulish armies rising from the underworld, promise to thrill those with a taste for high adventure and special effects. Two heroic witnesses battle the forces of evil by bearing fiery testimony to the truth before being slain in the streets; yet as the curtain falls at the end of chapter 11, they are vindicated, and the forces of God regroup before the agents of the evil empire can strike back.¹¹
 - a. **The place of the opening chapters:** Those in search of seven-headed monsters may find the messages to the seven churches to be rather tame, yet these chapters are among the most important in the book because they create the context in which the later visions can be understood. They make clear that John’s visions do not float freely in heaven but address issues confronting Christian congregations on earth. By taking the opening chapters seriously, readers can better ask how the visions in the later part of the book address the situations of people engaged in a struggle of faith.¹²

2. Why Revelation?

¹⁰ Chester, Tim. *Revelation For You: Seeing history from heaven's perspective* (p. 7). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

¹¹ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 45.

¹² Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 46.

- a. Victorinus (an early church leader and martyr) would say this about the portrayal of Jesus in Revelation, **“He is, because He endures continually; He was, because with the father he made all things, and has at this time taken a beginning from the virgin; He is to come, because assuredly He will come to judgment.”**¹³
 - i. Here, Victorinus helps us to see the melodic line of Revelation – Jesus is victor.
 - 1. Victorinus was a bishop (leader) in the early church from 250-300 AD.
 - ii. This is how the early church understood this book, and it is how we should today.
 - iii. Because Jesus is victor, we can have hope... that is precisely the aim of Revelation, to inspire hope among a persecuted people.
 - 1. **Revelation is a book of hope.**
 - iv. You might feel a little suspicious of this if you have ever read or heard anything about Revelation... I.e., Isn't it a book about judgement?!?
 - v. Well, let's see what the opening of the letter has to say about its contents.
- b. **The first thing that we see is about the author and the intentions.**
 - i. It is from Jesus, and it is to disclose what is about to “soon” take place.
 - ii. **The chain of communication in v 1 is from God to Jesus to an angel to John and finally to Christian “servants.”** The phrase τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ (“to his servants”) refers to the community of faith, which has a general prophetic vocation, rather than to a limited group of prophets. This scheme of communication probably explains why in some sayings later in the book it is difficult to discern whether the speaker is God, Christ, or an angel, since the message actually derives from all three (note likewise that in the OT the angel of the Lord and God himself are sometimes indistinguishable [e.g., Gen. 18:1–33; 22:12–18; Judg. 6:11–18; 13:1–24]). The conclusion of the book confirms this reasoning by asserting that one angel sent from Christ revealed all of the visions to John (cf. 22:6, 8, 16).¹⁴
- c. **The second thing we see is that those who read it will be blessed.**
 - i. What is the blessing of Revelation? → That what is unclear would be made clear.
 - 1. Remember, that is the point of the genre of Apocalyptic literature.
 - 2. Again, what is being made clear? → Jesus is victor.
 - ii. **This is the first of seven beatitudes scattered through the book (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14).**¹⁵
 - 1. We are not to be scared of Revelation, instead, it is the only letter in the NT that proclaims it is good to be read.
- d. **Blessed is the one who reads it.**
 - i. Revelation is about two cities, two visions, two sets of values. But they're not spatial locations. The call to “come out of her” in 18:4 is not a geographic movement. **We can't disentangle ourselves from Babylon—the world that lives without reference to God—nor are we to live in a ghetto. It's a movement of the imagination: the decision to live by a different vision of the world. It's a different allegiance—one that changes everything.**¹⁶ → This connects back to 1 Peter 2:9-11... We are citizens of a new kingdom while living in the old digs. There will be tension, discomfort, and difficulty in making ethical decisions. If we are to construct a worldview that presupposes that we will not encounter that tension, we

¹³ Dr. Michael Cooper, *A Faithful Witness* (Ephesiology Press, 2021), 20.

¹⁴ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 183.

¹⁵ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 52–53.

¹⁶ Chester, Tim. *Revelation For You: Seeing history from heaven's perspective* (p. 12). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

are not being honest with ourselves or the text. The whole reason that the NT letters and Revelation were written was because believers in the first century faced the tension of living out the values of a new kingdom while living in the old digs.

ii. Who is to read it? → You, me, & we.

1. *Reads* here means ‘reads aloud’, and in view of the context there is no real doubt but that reading in church is meant. This implies that John regards his book as holy Scripture. This is all the more likely in that he proceeds to call it a *prophecy* (even if we omit *this*, with some good mss there is no doubt that it is this book to which he is referring). This will also be the significance of the warning against meddling with its contents which he places at the end (22:18–19). It is for this reason that a blessing can be called down on those who read and who hear the book. If it were a merely human product this would be incongruous. As a divine revelation it is most natural.¹⁷
2. This means, that both a personal and a corporate reading of the text are important and valuable.

iii. What is meant by prophecy?

1. **We should not understand *prophecy* to mean ‘prediction’.** The word does allow for prediction (and there is certainly a liberal element of prediction in this book), but basically it points to divine origin. **The prophet was a man who could say, ‘Thus says the Lord.’ This book is from God. John proceeds to call not only for a hearing of it but for an observing of what is written in it.** He does not wish merely to stimulate interest but to influence action. Scripture is a guide to conduct as well as the source of doctrine.¹⁸

e. **Blessed is the one who hears its words.**

- i. Hearing in the biblical tradition is never exclusively about the auditory action of “hearing.”
- ii. It is always about transformation. → To hear in the biblical sense is to adopt, digest, and be changed in a way that then results in outward action.
 1. It is the same connection that we understand with our kids or spouses.... “Did you hear me?” is not a question about the auditory process of hearing. It is a question of action.
 2. I.e., Danielle and I try to be clear with our kids... listening (hearing) results in obedience.
 - a. It is the same for God’s Word.... And what is the next blessing? → Obedience.
 - b. I.e., If you hear these words, it will transform you.

f. **Blessed is the one who keeps to it.**

- i. **John’s witness to the heavenly commentary concerning what God has done in Christ is not intended as an apocalyptic curiosity to tantalize the intellect but to inform Christians about how God wants them to live in the light of recent redemptive history.** The book contains information for the mind, but it is information that entails ethical obligation. That the book has an ultimate ethical aim is borne out by the conclusion in 22:6–21, which is an intentional expansion of the prologue in 1:1–3, and especially by the ethical emphasis of 1:3 (cf. the phraseological parallels in 22:7b, 9b, 10b, 18a, 19a).¹⁹

¹⁷ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 52–53.

¹⁸ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 52–53.

¹⁹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 184.

1. **The Apocalypse Was Revealed So that Believers Would Be Blessed By Having a Heavenly Perspective on Redemptive History and Consequently Obeying the Commands of the Lord of History (1:3)**²⁰
- ii. Again, this letter isn't for mere information or for some sort of divine foretelling... it is giving a heavenly perspective on an earthly situation, so that believers would respond accordingly.
 1. What is the right response? → Faithfulness.

3. Anticipation, Hope, and Faithfulness

- a. We started this sermon with the idea that we are to find transforming principles in the text and not just explaining timelines.
 - i. What is the principle that we are to see in the opening verses? → The importance of anticipation in relationship to faithfulness.
 - ii.
- b. **Anticipation** – The longing and expecting of something to happen... particularly something good.
 - i. Yes, anticipation can have a negative tone, but tend to differentiate that with the word, worry.
 - ii. We are to anticipate the things that are going to happen soon.
 1. Again, the prime thing is that Jesus will have the final victory.
 2. As we anticipate this and abide in Christ, we grow in hope not fear for what is to come.
 - iii. Anticipation is not going to relieve all of the tension from the text or our lives. In fact, tension in our lives is a good thing, something that keeps us grounded and reminded that we are not God.
- c. Can anticipation set us free from tension? → **What is at risk for us when we think that we are able or even that we should be able to live out a worldview that relieves all of the tension?**
 - i. **Set ourselves up for disenfranchisement.** I.e., Think house of cards. When everything is neat and clean theologically, ethically, and philosophically you knocked one card down and the whole thing crumbles.
 1. This is often what is at the root of the current deconversion / deconstruction movement.
 - ii. **Look for secret knowledge** – In order to keep a lack of tension, we can be driven down the road of secret knowledge that solves and alleviates the tension for us. The internet quickly becomes a source of “new or higher” truth. There is no shortage of teachers, voices, and perspectives that affirm our perceptions. We must resist the urge to outsource out theology, instead, we are to embrace the hard work of intellectual honesty.
 1. Secondly, if we feel as if this only applies to the “other side” we need to reexamine our own “side.”
 - iii. **Alienate neighbors** – When we live in a worldview that leaves no room for tension, we ultimately live in a space that suffocates growth due to an increasingly myopic perspective. As we stay in that limited soil, we begin to see those who are not “just like us” as inferior, lacking, or insufficient. It is really hard to care for someone let alone share relationship with them when you look down on them.
 - iv. **Live with a lack of grace** – A very NT warning comes for us that as we live in a lack of tension, we quickly become seduced by the siren song of pride that comes from legalism.

²⁰ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 184.

Legalism ultimately states, I have transcended the need for God because I have secured my salvation through my performance. If there is no tension, there is no need for repentance or humility. And, again, ultimately, no need for grace. Being a person who has no need of grace, makes you unbearable. The greatest personal risk is the emotional cliff we walk along when we live without a need for grace. Eventually, we may just become aware of the damage that has done and we can go tumbling off of the cliff.

- d. **Hope** – Biblical hope is more than a simple wish; it entails certainty based on God’s demonstration of faithfulness to people in the history of salvation as recorded in the Scriptures and as experienced by the church.²¹
 - i. Rather than expressing the desire for a particular outcome that is uncertain, hope in the NT by definition is characterized by certainty.²²
 - ii. Because we have the certainty that Jesus is victor, we are then prompted to live faithfully now as we wait for the realization of that hope.
- e. **Faithfulness** – Faith is a forward looking trust, that is rooted in God’s past provision.
 - i. Let’s come back to the “soon” note of v. 1.
 - 1. Soon is less of a day and hour to figure out and more of a posture of expectancy.
 - ii. How does this inform our posture? → Expectant and faithful to be about the mission.
 - 1. Great commission living is motivated by Great Commandment love.
 - iii. What does our statement of faith say? → Statement #9 – Christ’s Return
 - 1. We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, **motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.**
- f. If Jesus is the victor... what changes for me because of that truth?
 - i. EFCA SOF → **motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.**
 - ii. What is going to change in my Monday to Friday life if the claims of this book are true?
 - iii. How will I approach my relationships if the claims of this book are true?
 - iv. How does this inform my efforts if the claims of this book are true?
 - 1. So often in our modern American context, we think, “I’ll do it. I’ll fix myself. I’ll read the next self-help book and way to live manual. I’ll be better.”
 - 2. These aren’t bad things or ideas, but they aren’t complete.
 - 3. John wants us to be saturated in the core idea of this letter, Jesus is victor. If he is victor then I am to linger and abide in that truth, as I do that, he transforms me from the inside out.

²¹ Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 61.

²² Brad J. Eastman, “Hope,” ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 499.