

# Letting God be God

## Revelation 1:4-20

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



Life in Rome is all about power and who has it and who doesn't. IN 90 AD (around the time John wrote Revelation), only a third of people living in the Roman Empire had any form of citizenship. And within that small group, an even smaller portion had full citizenship. In the Roman system, citizenship was tiered at different levels. And, you could only get full citizenship if you had done something extraordinarily important for the empire or it had been passed down to you via your family line. See, in Rome, power coalesced at the top, and everywhere you went in the empire, there were symbols, signs, and markers that reminded you of that fact. There was one ultimate authority, and you were not to forget it. Even the Emperor wasn't just another human; he was considered divine, a literal god on earth. 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.<sup>1</sup> To be a Christian was to proclaim Jesus as Lord not Cesar, and that put you in direct opposition of the empire.

Today, Christians are still in a position of opposition to the empires and values of the world. Why? Because we continue to proclaim Jesus as Lord. And that states that he alone reigns supreme, that he and his kingdom alone will last forever. And that, ultimately, his values and prescriptions for life are to be held to at all times. Even more than governments, we are in conflict with the modern value of freedom and individualism. We are promised that my freedom is the highest value and will offer me fulfillment and competition. See, in that way I proclaim myself to be lord and I put myself on God's throne. Yet, what we will come to see in John's first vision is that if we submit to Jesus as Lord, we will find our greatest freedom. In other words, **if God is God, I don't need to be.**

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<sup>1</sup> Chester, Tim. Revelation For You: Seeing history from heaven's perspective (p. 7). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition. Letting God be God – Rev. 1:4-20 (Feb. 12th, 2023) Speaker: Kyle Bartholic

## 1. Grace (v. 4a, 5b-6, 10, 17b)

- a. The message is an action of grace to the churches.
  - i. Often when we think of or read through the book of Revelation, we get focused on the “judgment” side of things. → And, yes, we are not to miss that reality.
    - 1. **2 Tim 4:1 – I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom...**
      - a. Paul tells Timothy this in the context of the command to preach the Word of God.
    - 2. **1 Pet. 4:5 – <sup>5</sup> but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.**
    - 3. **Matt. 25:31ff – <sup>31</sup> “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.**
      - a. These are Jesus’ words about himself! → Don’t miss the Son of Man connection with Revelation.
      - b. Son of Man is Jesus’ preferred title and the one he uses for himself.
    - 4. **2 Cor. 5:10 – <sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.**
    - 5. **Rev. 22:12ff – <sup>12</sup> “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. <sup>13</sup> I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”**
      - a. Again, these are Jesus’ words about himself. → Note the connection back to chapter 1, “I am the Alpha and Omega.”
  - ii. **We like the picture and notion of Jesus as the gracious, kind, and even soft shepherd that cuddles his lambs.** → That is not wrong, it just isn’t complete.
    - 1. Revelation is a book of grace and hope because it is a book that shows us the power, sovereignty, and righteous judgment of Jesus.
    - 2. **The first vision in Revelation is not one of an event but of a person:** the crucified and risen Christ, the one who could say, “I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever” (1:18). The last vision in Revelation brings readers not only to the New Jerusalem but to the throne of God and the Lamb (22:3); so that the expected response to the book’s message is “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (22:20).<sup>2</sup>
    - 3. Jesus as the sovereign King is a biblical reality and conviction.
  - iii. **What is grace? → Getting something that you don’t deserve and could not earn.**
    - 1. Going back to the image of Jesus snuggling a lamb – I think one reason we really like that image is not just because of the lack of authority it conveys about Jesus, but more so that we would like to think of ourselves as “innocent little lambs.”
    - 2. However, that is not the case! → We are a full-grown, lost, and stubborn sheep.
      - a. **Rom. 3:23 – <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**
      - b. **Jn. 3:16 – <sup>16</sup> “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**

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<sup>2</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, Second Edition. (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 59.  
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- i. Both Paul and John affirm the reality that we are lost and are not “innocently wayward lambs” who didn’t know any better.
    - ii. God sent his Son, because we needed rescued.
  - 3. **The gracious reality is that Jesus is compassionate and judge. Because he is both (fully and completely) God not only holds us accountable but offers us the gift of life (which we don’t deserve).**
- iv. **Our modern equivalence problem.**
  - 1. In our modern moment, we have an equivalence problem in our rhetoric, that is, communal speech. We think that two opposite things cannot be true at the same time or that respect means we must see everything identically or myopically.
  - 2. Examples of new equivalence:
    - a. **Hearing = Agreement**
      - i. Reality – When I hear you, that is I understand you.
    - b. **Tolerance = On the same page**
      - i. Reality – Tolerance is respect for opposing viewpoints.
    - c. **Empathy = Enablement**
      - i. Reality – Empathy is feeling someone’s feelings while not enabling destructive or unhealthy patterns.
    - d. **Grace = Affirmation**
      - i. Reality – Grace requires truth, and this is what we see fully in Jesus.
- v. Again, as we continue to open this book, we are greeted with a vision that clarifies for us who Jesus is. → The righteous judge and the one who offers us grace.
  - 1. **Revelation is a book of hope, because Jesus is victor.**
  - 2. **Revelation is a book of grace, because we are reminded that Jesus offers his victory to us.**
    - a. **How do we see grace in this section?**
- b. **“Grace and peace to you...”** – The opening greeting reminds the audience of the intentions of the author. (v. 4a)
  - i. In the greeting, *grace and peace* (see the note on 1 Thess. 1:1) are said to be from *him who is, and who was, and who is to come* (cf. 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5). **This most unusual expression clearly refers to God the Father.** The Greek is not grammatical (*apo* is followed by nominatives, and *ēn* is preceded by an article), but it is an arresting way of stressing the changelessness and the eternity of God.<sup>3</sup> → **‘In the terrible days in which he was writing John stayed his heart on the changelessness of God, and used the defiance of grammar to underline his faith.’**
    - 1. → In Revelation, the last part of the threefold clause, *erchomai* (ὁ ἐρχόμενος), is to be understood eschatologically and as referring to God’s sovereign consummation of history in the future.<sup>4</sup>
  - ii. **Grace and peace are extended through John to the audience from the Father, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus.**
    - 1. The very giving of this revelation (i.e., a heavenly explanation of an earthly reality) is an act of grace.
    - 2. Even the titles or descriptions for the God-head are indicative of grace.
      - a. The Father does not change (is, was, and is to come).

<sup>3</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (InterVarsity Press, 1987), 53.

<sup>4</sup> 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), 188.

- b. The Spirit is the same as he has always been.
  - c. Jesus is a faithful witness because he is sovereign.
- iii. Let's unpack the Trinity in v. 4b-5a.
  1. **The Father** - is described in peculiar fashion as "always constant." → Consider the connection to **Exodus 3:13-15** - <sup>13</sup> **Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"** <sup>14</sup> **God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM."** **And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'** " <sup>15</sup> **God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.**
    - a. Cf. v 8 – "I am the Alpha and Omega..."
  2. **The Holy Spirit - The seven Spirits who are before His throne** (v. 4) is one of the more perplexing expressions in the Book of Revelation. Commentators usually take it to mean "the sevenfold Spirit of God"—a reference to the Holy Spirit as described in Isaiah 11:2. **He is there called the Spirit of the Lord, of wisdom, of understanding, of counsel, of might, of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord.**<sup>5</sup>
  3. **Jesus Christ** - The third source of grace and peace is *Jesus Christ*, mentioned for the third time in the prologue (and not again throughout the book; John prefers simply 'Jesus'). **He is the faithful witness (cf. 3:14; Ps. 89:37). John put emphasis on witness in verse 2 and this hammers his point home. He leaves us in no doubt that what he reports is well attested.**<sup>6</sup>
    - a. This threefold description is meant **"to encourage ... believers about to enter severe persecution," since they can have confidence that Christ has suffered the same thing and overcome it and that therefore they will be empowered to do likewise.**<sup>7</sup>
    - b. In calling Jesus **the ruler over the kings of the earth, John is lifting the horizon of his readers' perspective above the earthly rulers**, who are the visible source of their sufferings, to Him who sits enthroned above the kings of the earth, exercising absolute sovereignty over them (Prov. 21:1; Dan. 2:21; 4:17).<sup>8</sup>
  4. **Again, this revelation is an extension of grace from God to the original audience...** that is how they understood it, and it is how we are to understand it today.
    - a. I.e., This is why last week we said, Revelation isn't exclusively about timelines, but is instead about timeless principles.
    - b. Not only is grace extended from God, but also from John who sympathizes and empathizes with them.
- c. **John – A partner in your tribulations...** (v. 9)
  - i. John first underlines his lowliness, speaking of himself as *your brother*, and going on to remind his readers that he shared with them in *suffering*. This word means sore trouble and in the Greek it is linked under one article with *kingdom and patient endurance* (this last means an

<sup>5</sup> Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), 54.

<sup>6</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 54.

<sup>7</sup> 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), 190.

<sup>8</sup> Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), 55.

active and manly endurance not a negative resignation; it is translated 'perseverance' in 2:2 where see note). **The three, in some sense are linked: the trials and the kingdom go together.**<sup>9</sup>

1. → As we will see, John is exiled on Patmos for his faithful preaching of the gospel.
2. I.e., John understands from a first-hand sense what they are going through. He is not writing from a cushy resort.
- ii. John could have been consumed with his own sufferings... there were plenty of them.
  1. Patmos was a small island where Rome exiled political prisoners.
  2. **Key question: Am I others centered, even in the tough moments of my life?**
    - a. In other words, am I willing to share in someone's tough stuff even as I have tough stuff of my own?
    - b. Caution – This isn't a call to ignore your needs, but is a reminder that when we give God's love away, it changes our perspective on our own suffering.
  3. John was suffering and they were suffering... Together they were spurred on to live faithfully. → **They were becoming like Jesus together.**
- d. **The action of the gospel.** (v.5b-6, 18)
  - i. Here we hear of the work of Jesus and that is the message of the gospel.
    1. Jesus has freed us from our sin and made us into something that we could not become on our own, that is, a kingdom of priests.
    2. **He has made us a kingdom.** The kingdom of God was the main topic in the teaching of Jesus and we find here that it is those who are Christ's who constitute the kingdom. It is not like earthly kingdoms, a realm with known boundaries, population, etc.
    3. **It consists of those who have been loosed from their sins through Christ and who now live to do his service.**
    4. **The order is important.** First comes the reference to his redeeming work and only then that to the kingdom. As a result of what Christ has done for them, believers become other than they were.<sup>10</sup>
  - ii. Again, God is making himself known and offering something to humanity that they could not have done for themselves. → This is grace.
- e. **John receives grace – His response is the right response, "as though dead."** (v.17)
  - i. This point gets into the nature and theology of God, which we'll get into, but we see God's grace extended to John.
    1. John's response is the right response when being in front of God.
    2. Jesus' response back to John, is grace.
  - ii. John's response to the vision in v 17a follows the fourfold pattern found in **Daniel 8 and 10**: the prophet observes a vision, falls on his face in fear, is strengthened by a heavenly being, and then receives further revelation from that being, which is introduced by a form of λαλέω ("speak"). This is another clue further identifying John and his message with OT prophetic authority (cf. 1:10).<sup>11</sup>
    1. Cf. **Isa. 6:5 – <sup>5</sup>And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"**

<sup>9</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 56.

<sup>10</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 54.

<sup>11</sup> 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), 213.

- iii. As we consider the power and presence of grace in the opening words, we are also to consider the one who offers it, God.

## 2. God (v. 10-20)

- a. The images describing God – Again, it is important that the first vision offered in this letter is not of events but is of a person, Jesus.
  - i. We have already heard some titles and descriptions of the Trinity, but let us now look at the vision that describes Jesus.
  - ii. In the Spirit... On the Lord's day... What does this mean?
    - 1. The clearest understanding is that John was in worship on Sunday.
    - 2. *I was (egenomēn)* means 'I came to be' (as also in the previous verse). *In the Spirit* is an expression not uncommon in the New Testament, though elsewhere it is used of such things as prayer, love, or even baptism. The use here is peculiar to Revelation and is found again in 4:2; 17:3; 21:10. It may denote something like a trance. It is certainly a state in which the Seer is specially open to the Holy Spirit and ready to see visions.<sup>12</sup>
    - 3. "The day of the Lord..." – **The phrase is clearly and consistently used of Sunday from the second half of the second century on**, and John understands the OT idea of the Day of the Lord as pertaining to the restricted period of the final judgment, exclusive of the preparatory judgments leading up to it (cf. Rev. 6:17; 16:14).<sup>13</sup>
- b. Who is Jesus?
  - i. V.7 – Jesus is coming back and will be seen by everyone.
    - 1. **John thinks of him as coming *with the clouds*, a description which recalls what is said of 'one like a son of man' (Dan. 7:13).** Clouds are often mentioned in the Old Testament in connection with divine activity (e.g., Num. 11:25; Ps. 104:3; Isa. 19:1), and we are to think here of a scene of divine majesty as the Lord Jesus returns to earth in triumph.<sup>14</sup> → Cf. 1 Thes. 4 & Zec 12:10
      - a. **Their (Rome / society) overthrow means the triumph of good and the vindication of Christians who had suffered so much. John exults in it.**<sup>15</sup>
  - ii. **John's vision** (vv.12-16)
    - 1. **The 7 lampstands** – Jesus is the center of the lampstands → He is the head of the church. (cf. Eph 1:22)
      - a. **The Son of the man' seems to be taken directly from Daniel 7:13** where we read of a heavenly Being coming with the clouds and receiving a mighty dominion. **Clearly John ascribed the highest place to Christ.** The *robe reaching down to his feet* is the mark of a person of distinction.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 56–57.

<sup>13</sup> 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), 203.

<sup>14</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 55.

<sup>15</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 55.

<sup>16</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 58.

- b. Most commentators agree that the significance of this is that Christ is portrayed as a kingly and priestly figure, since the figure in the two Daniel texts has the same features. **Part of Christ's priestly role is to tend the lampstands. The OT priest would trim the lamps, remove the wick and old oil, refill the lamps with fresh oil, and relight those that had gone out.**<sup>17</sup>
  - c. **The initial revelation, a startling one perhaps, is not of a future event, but of a present reality.** The exalted Christ is already present among the churches that are represented by the golden lampstands.<sup>18</sup>
- 2. **Christ's robe** in 1:13 may be priestly or kingly. In the Roman army the longer your robe, the higher your rank. Jesus has a robe right down to his feet. But the lampstands evoke the temple and so we should also think of Jesus here dressed as our High Priest.
- 3. **Christ's white hair** may be a sign of honor and wisdom (v 14). But primarily it's an allusion to the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9, for Jesus is God (as well as being the son of man, v 13, who receives authority from God). The Ancient of Days sits as the judge in a courtroom (Daniel 7:10)
  - a. Like 'the Ancient of Days' (i.e. God himself, Dan. 7:9) his hair is likened to white wool. **White hair conveys ideas like wisdom and the dignity of age** (Stoffel sees it as 'the symbol of holiness' and Ladd as representing deity). Wool, of course, is not necessarily white, but when pure wool is white it is very white, and this is reinforced by adding the comparison to *snow*.<sup>19</sup>
- 4. **Christ's blazing eyes** in Revelation 1:14 denote his ability to see, and therefore judge, people's hearts (as 2:18, 23 makes clear).
- 5. **Christ has feet like glowing bronze** (1:15) which also echoes the description of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9-10, and probably denote the purity of his judgments (Revelation 1:15).
  - a. The *feet* are likened to *chalkolibanon* (χαλκολίβανον). This word is not found anywhere before this book, **and neither here nor in its other occurrence (2:18) does the context make clear what it means.**<sup>20</sup>
  - b. But Christ's glowing feet are primarily an allusion to Daniel 10:6
- 6. **Christ's voice being like the sound of rushing water** (Revelation 1:15) **and his face being like the sun** (v 16; see Leviticus 6:25).
  - a. **Daniel sees a figure whose glory overwhelmed him, but who then empowered Daniel to speak of the cosmic battle which Christ would win.**
  - b. Incidentally, this description is singularly appropriate for one living on the small island of Patmos and never far from the sound of the breakers.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> 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), 208–209.

<sup>18</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 59.

<sup>19</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 58.

<sup>20</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 58.

<sup>21</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 58–59.

7. **Christ holds seven stars** (Revelation 1:16), which represent God's people (Daniel 12:3).
  - a. **But it also counters the claims of the empire.** Coins from the reign of Emperor Domitian show his heir (who died in childhood) as the infant Zeus, playing with the stars. The message was that, while the death of the emperor's son meant he would never reign on earth, he was deified and reigning in heaven. By portraying Jesus holding the stars, John claims that Jesus is the true Son of God, who, having died, now reigns in heaven.
  - b. The Zechariah lampstand and the stars of Dan. 12:3 were thus equated in Jewish writings, so that their combination in Rev. 1:20 is natural and may suggest that the "stars," even if angelic, **represent the church's heavenly existence and the "lampstands" its earthly existence.**<sup>22</sup>
8. **Christ's sword** (Revelation 1:16) represents his power to judge (Isaiah 11:4; 49:2; Revelation 2:16; 19:15), though its double edge may suggest Christ's words can both judge and save, wound and heal (Hebrews 4:12-13).
  - a. The "sharp two-edged sword" proceeding from Jesus' mouth is based on the prophecies of **Isa. 11:4 and 49:2**, which adds further to his depiction as an eschatological judge and as the one beginning to fulfill this messianic expectation.<sup>23</sup>
9. **Christ's face like the sun** (Revelation 1:16) alludes to Daniel 10:6, which suggests Jesus is a warrior who fights on behalf of his people. The repeated use of the words "like" and "as" alert us to the fact that we're not meant to take this vision literally.
  - a. Pictures attempting to depict John's description always look grotesque or weird. **Instead, John presents a sequence of richly resonant images to convey the overwhelming glory of Christ.**<sup>24</sup>
- iii. The very image of Jesus is one that is striking and would be terrible for those who are opposed to him.<sup>25</sup>
  1. The Christians in Asia are to understand that Jesus will do battle in this manner not only against the evil nations (19:15) but also against all those among the churches who compromise their faith (2:16).<sup>26</sup>
- c. The contrast of the Roman symbols of power and divinity.
  - i. **Sharing in the kingdom of Jesus involves sharing in his sufferings.** What hope is there? Very little if you looked around you in the first-century Roman Empire. The empire was full of imagery and symbols that dripped with enormous confidence. Everywhere you looked there were images of power and authority—lions, eagles, gods. The Romans brought the children of conquered nations to Rome because they knew it would overwhelm them and win them over to Roman culture. It was part of the way they

<sup>22</sup> 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), 211.

<sup>23</sup> 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), 211–212.

<sup>24</sup> Chester, Tim. *Revelation For You: Seeing history from heaven's perspective* (pp. 23-24). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

<sup>25</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 59.

<sup>26</sup> 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), 212.



assimilated other cultures into their own. Maybe the Christians felt like that. **They saw the power and pomp of Rome, and found it intimidating or alluring.**<sup>27</sup>

- ii. **And his message to them and to us is this: grace and peace. In the midst of hostility and pressure, you can know grace and peace because God the Father is Almighty, because God the Spirit is all-present, and because God the Son is all-conquering.**<sup>28</sup>
- d. Key question: D
  - i. Does it inspire hope and comfort in me?
  - ii. Does it terrify and trouble me?
  - iii. Am I inclined towards it in reverence or to dismiss it?
    - 1. Why am I reacting that way? And, what does my reaction then teach me about my perspective on God's glory?

### 3. Glory

- a. Glory is a word that you might have heard in church before. It is a word that can get thrown around. → Glory involves a right perspective on God that is reflective of his position, and it implies that Christ-like living on the part of the Christian is an action of declaring God's glory.
  - i. A biblical term used in reference to the unapproachable and mighty manifestation of the immediate presence of God. The biblical concept of glory carries with it connotations of inexpressible beauty and majesty.<sup>29</sup>
- b. The right position and perspective on God.
  - i. The vision of Jesus positions the reader to have a right perspective on him, and that is, to ascribe glory to Christ.
  - ii. The placing of this vision of Christ right at the beginning of the book is significant. This book is an unveiling or revealing (see on v. 1). **The Christians were a pitifully small group, persecuted by mighty foes. To all outward appearance their situation was hopeless. But it is only as Christ is seen for what he really is that anything else can be seen for what it really is.**
  - iii. So for these persecuted ones it was important that first of all the glory and the majesty of the risen Lord be made clear.<sup>30</sup>
- c. Right action -
  - i. He has made you priests... (v.6)
    - 1. **The high point of vv 1–6, and of the whole chapter, is here: the achievement of God's glory through Christ's work and the service of his people as kings and priests.** That God is to receive glory means that he alone is worthy to receive credit for the successful accomplishment of redemptive history.<sup>31</sup>
      - a. **The remainder of the book will explain exactly how they do this in the midst of suffering brought on by life in a pagan society.**

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<sup>27</sup> Chester, Tim. *Revelation For You: Seeing history from heaven's perspective* (p. 21). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

<sup>28</sup> Chester, Tim. *Revelation For You: Seeing history from heaven's perspective* (p. 27). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

<sup>29</sup> Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 55.

<sup>30</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 57.

<sup>31</sup> 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), 194.

- b. The *seven lampstands* are the *seven churches*, the actual existent churches. The churches are no more than *lampstands*. **The light is Christ, and they are to show him forth.**<sup>32</sup>
- ii. **The Apocalypse reveals that their reign, like Jesus' initial kingship, consists in "conquering" by not compromising their faithful witness in the face of trials (e.g., 2:9–11, 13; 3:8; 12:11), in ruling over the powers of evil (e.g., 6:8 in relation to 6:9–11), in defeating sin in their lives (see chs. 2–3), and in beginning to rule over death and Satan by identification with Jesus (cf. 1:5–6, 18).** Their endurance is part of the process of "conquering" (see the concluding promise in each of the letters). The "tribulation" is a present reality (so also 2:9) and will continue among the churches in the near future (2:10, 22).<sup>33</sup>
- d. **What does it mean to bring glory or give glory to God in your life?** Four aspects that are your acts of both physical resistance in this age and over the spiritual battle.
  - i. **Not compromising your faithful witness** – Remember Peter's words (1 Pet. 3:15) – **"...always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..."**
    - 1. The validity of my public life begins in private. → Is God making my day?
  - ii. **Rule over the powers of evil by doing good** – Believers are to be about the common good of their neighbors. (cf. 1 Pet. 2:12) → This is a historic position of the church in times of great social pressure and turmoil is to treat others uncommonly well.
    - 1. In the middle through late Roman empire Christians were known to rescue infants who had been abandoned to die.
    - 2. **"But, perhaps above all else, Christianity brought a new conception of humanity to a world saturated with capricious cruelty and the vicarious love of death. ... Finally, what Christianity gave to its converts was nothing less than their humanity."**<sup>34</sup>
  - iii. **Defeat sin in your life** – If you are in Christ, you are to live like it. (1 Jn. 2:6)
    - 1. This is a daily battle and one that is won in the trenches of repeated and routine repentance. That is, stepping off of the way of self and back onto the way of Jesus.
    - 2. Defeating sin also requires that we take sin seriously. Sin easily snares and tangles us up when we rationalize, excuse, and make room for it in seemingly small ways.
  - iv. **Defeat the powers of this age by identifying with Jesus** – Paul reminds us in Eph. 6:12 that our fight is not just a physical one, but a spiritual one. The greatest act of spiritual rebellion against the devil and the values of this age is repeated and routine identification with Jesus.
    - 1. Your faithfulness is not a passive and personal pursuit on its own. It is an act of spiritual resistance and warfare.
  - v. When I submit to God as God, I am set free to live a life of peace and flourishing now in part, and completely in eternity.

<sup>32</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 61.

<sup>33</sup> 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), 201–202.

<sup>34</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, (Harper Collins, 1997), 214–215.

1. The “in-part” reality is that I get foretastes now of the goodness and the glory to come.

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**Reading List:** If you are looking for a book as a reading companion as we walk through Revelation, please consider one of the following. These are theologically centered and will help you focus on the timeless principles of Revelation.

1. Michael Gorman: *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb into the New Creation* (2011)
2. Tim Chester: *Revelation For You: Seeing history from heaven's perspective* (The Good Book Company, 2019)
3. G.K. Beale: *A shorter Commentary on Revelation* (Eerdmans, 2015)
4. Dr. Michael Cooper, *A Faithful Witness* (Ephesiology Press, 2021)
  - a. Full disclosure – Dr. Cooper is a former professor of mine from Trinity. When this book came out, I was given an advanced copy and asked to write an endorsement.
5. Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (InterVarsity Press, 1987)
6. Steve Gregg: *Revelation: Four Views. A Parallel Commentary* (Thomas Nelson, 1997)

#### **Additional Notes:**

On the number 7:

- The “seven churches” refer to seven historical churches in Asia, but the number “seven” could hardly have arisen by chance. This is the favorite number of the Apocalypse, which has been influenced by the OT predilection for the number. In the OT seven was used to denote “fullness,” that is, the time necessary for something to be done effectively, or a general designation of thoroughness or completeness (see below on v 4b). Sometimes seven is both literal and figurative (e.g., in Leviticus 4–16 “sprinkling blood seven times” is both a literal action and a figurative representation of a complete, effective act). Other times it is purely figurative for completeness (e.g., Lev. 26:18–28: God will punish Israel “seven times” if they do not repent—not seven distinct punishments but a complete chastisement). The idea of completeness originates from the creation account in Genesis 1, where six days of creation are followed by the consummate seventh day of God’s rest.
  - **Against this background and in the light of the clear figurative uses of “seven” elsewhere in Revelation, the number here points to the concept of “fullness.”**<sup>35</sup>

On the Angels:

- So it is suggested that the expression may point to the essential ‘spirit’ of the churches. Thus Swete can say: ‘In this symbolical book the angel of a Church may be simply an expression for its prevailing spirit, and thus be identified with the Church itself’, and Sweet: ‘the churches seen as spiritual entities’.<sup>36</sup> →

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<sup>35</sup> 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), 186.

<sup>36</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 61.

There are difficulties in the way of all views, but perhaps fewest in that of seeing the *angels* as the spirits of the churches, standing for and symbolizing the churches.

- Corporate representation (i.e., heavenly and earthly) - The fuller reason for addressing the churches through their representative angels is to remind the churches that already a dimension of their existence is heavenly, that their real home is not with the unbelieving “earth dwellers” (cf. “earth dwellers” in 3:10 and *passim*), and that they have heavenly help and protection in their struggle not to be conformed to their pagan environment. **And one of the purposes of the church meeting on earth in its weekly gatherings (e.g., 1:3, 9) is to be reminded of its heavenly existence and identity by modeling its worship and liturgy on the angels’ and heavenly church’s worship of the exalted Lamb.**<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> 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), 218.