

Rev. 1:1-3. the Book of the Last Days

by Horatius Bonar

The book of Revelation is a practical book that guides the Church, warns kings and kingdoms, and lifts us out of the region of the visible into that of the invisible.

Scripture: Revelation 1:1

Topics: "The Revelation of Christ", "Prophecy and Blessing"

Description

Horatius Bonar emphasizes the significance of the Book of Revelation as the ultimate unveiling of Jesus Christ, showcasing His glory and the prophetic truths concerning the end times. He highlights that this revelation is a divine gift from the Father to the Son, and then to His servants, urging believers to study and keep the words written within it. Bonar stresses the importance of angelic ministry in conveying God's messages and the blessings that come from reading and hearing this prophecy. He calls for a renewed commitment to understanding the prophetic word, which serves as a guide for the Church in the last days. Ultimately, Bonar encourages believers to remain watchful and engaged with the truths of Scripture as they await Christ's return.

Transcript

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John--who bore record of the Word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. Blessed is he who reads, and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein--for the time is at hand!"--Revelation 1:1-3.

The TITLE of this last and most wondrous of inspired books is 'the revelation (uncovering, unveiling) of Jesus Christ'. It is He who "unveils," and it is He who is here unveiled to us, and who shines out with transfiguration-brightness before the Church's eye. The spirit and sum of this book is 'testimony to Jesus' (ch. 19:10). He is its Alpha and its Omega. We find Him everywhere--in description, in song, in symbol, in prediction; in things past, present, and to come. Here Christ is all and in all. This last book completes the "unveiling" which was begun in the Gospels and carried on through the Epistles. The last fragment of the veil is here taken from His face. We see Him as He is, on the Father's right hand, on the throne, through the rent veil. The heavens are opened, and we see Him (as Stephen did) in His present glory and in the glory of His second coming.

Which God gave unto Him. This unveiling is given to Him by the Father that He may give it to us; for even on the throne is He subject to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:28), waiting on His will and doing it. This revelation is God's gift to Him, and it is His gift to us; becoming thus doubly precious, as a gift worthy of God--worthy to be given to Him, and worthy to be given by Him to us.

To show unto His servants. "Show" is the word used in the case of Moses--'the pattern showed to you in the mount' (Exodus 25:40; Hebrews 8:5); and is almost always used in reference to things submitted to the eye. They are sons, yet servants also; both of these names of honor belonging to Him who was both the Son and the Servant of the Father (Romans 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Revelation 7:3, 22:3). This book, then, consists of the things shown by Christ to His servants.

The things that must shortly come to pass. He had said, "This generation shall not pass away until all these things happen". The word is the same, signifying, not to be fulfilled, but to be or begin to be. So here it is the things that must shortly (or quickly) be--the things just about to be, that the Lord shows to His servants. And what He has shown to us it becomes us to study. These things are the unveiling of Christ, and of earth's future, in connection with Him, both in grace and glory, both in love and wrath. These are some of the things which the angels desire to look into, and in carrying out which they are specially 'ministering spirits;' and it does not become us, whom they chiefly concern, to slight them. Seeing that God has revealed them, we may conclude that they are neither too high nor too low for us, but worthy of most earnest thought. The tendency of the present age is to set aside prophecy as specially belonging to the supernatural, and therefore incredible and impossible to comprehend. Let us stand aloof from this incredulity, and welcome the prophetic word as all the more precious because supernatural and specially divine.

And He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John. More exactly the words run, 'and He signified it (having sent it by His angel) to His servant John.' This 'unveiling' is of no common importance; for mark the steps by which it reaches us. The Father gives it to the Son; the Son summons His angel (perhaps the angel who once and again ministered to Him on earth, as in Gethsemane); this angel descends from heaven with it, and makes it known to the prophet (ch. 22:16). All the agencies in heaven and earth are thus brought into connection with it. How valuable its contents must be when such pains are taken with its transmission! Shall we slight that book which has been thus attested and honored?

Here being those references to angelic agency of which this book is full. God takes us (as in Daniel) behind the scenes, and shows us the living instrumentality through which the movements of earth and the judgments of divine righteousness are wrought. We look into the inner and invisible world, and see angels there at work, executing God's purposes--the 'angels who excel in strength;' who 'do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His word;' His 'hosts;' His 'ministers that do His pleasure' (Psalm 103:20-21). ANGELS have far more to do in the affairs both of the Church and the world than we generally conceive. Ever at hand, ever waiting and watching, ever working, they help, they protect, they strengthen, they deliver, or they smite, they destroy, they inflict the judgments of God. In this last book of the Bible there is more of angelic ministry, both for good and evil, than in any other; as if men would need more to be reminded of this in the last days; and as if, when Satan comes down with his hosts, having great wrath, Michael and his hosts were to have more to do than ever; as if, in the battle of the great day, their numbers required to be reinforced, and their reserves brought up, to meet the multitudinous foe.

Who bore record of the word of God. It is the same JOHN who said, 'In the beginning was the Word,' that now is written to by his Lord. He who testified of his Lord on earth now testifies of Him as He sits in

heaven. And we know that his testimony is true. The Word spoken of in the Gospel, and the Word revealed in the Apocalypse, are one (Revelation 9:13); both of them revealing wonderfully the Son of the Father, the one in His grace, and the other in His glory. To believe this 'record' is to become a son of God; for it is faith that introduces us into the heavenly family. He who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.

And of the testimony of 'Jesus Christ'. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy, no less than of the four Gospels. To make known the divine contents of these two glorious names--Jesus and Christ--was John's special mission, both at the beginning and at the close of his life. He is a witness for Jesus from first to last. It is not merely of the eternal Word that he testifies, but of the 'Word made flesh,' 'God manifest in flesh,' the bearer of sin, the 'Savior of the world,' the Anointed of the Holy Spirit.

And of all things that he 'saw'. Here also the Gospel and the Revelation are similar. In the former we have what John saw of Jesus on earth (John 19:35 'he who saw bore record') in the latter, what he saw of Jesus in heaven. The earthly grace and the heavenly glory are thus proclaimed to us on like sure authority--that of an eye-witness, an inspired eye-witness, whose testimony has in it all that is true and certain, both in God and man. It is all true. Not only do the water and the blood bear witness, but 'the Spirit bears witness' (1 John 5:6); the testimony of God is greater than all the testimony of man (1 John 5:9). The reception of this testimony by the sinner, is life eternal.

Blessed is he who 'reads'. What God calls blessedness must be great; and that word 'blessed' is used by Him very frequently in the Old Testament and New. In this book it occurs seven times (1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, 22:14), as if the fullness or perfection of blessedness were contained in what this book reveals. The word "reads" refers to the public reading in the church (Luke 4:16; Acts 15:21; Colossians 4:16; Revelation 5:4). The reader even in his public reading finds blessing. God blesses him in so doing. Into him as well as out of him flow rivers of living water. Most wondrous book! It begins and ends with blessing on those who read it and give heed to it. How much has the Church of God lost by her neglect of it! It may be hard to be understood; but the privilege of reading it and keeping its sayings remains the same. Surely the Holy Spirit knew what He wrote, when He pronounced blessings on its readers and its observers! Not to gratify the curious; not to suit itching ears; not to encourage human speculation or restless guesses; not to excite the excitable, or furnish materials for poetry; but to feed the Church of God; to be a light in a dark place; to set up a line of beacons along the rocky and stormy coast of the Church's perilous voyage; to be her chart and compass in the last days; to make man wakeful, happy, and blessed; to bring us into sympathy with the mind and purpose of God--these are the objects of a book in which Father, Son, and spirit are all engaged.

And those who 'hear' the words of this prophecy. Those who are but listeners receive the blessing too. To hear the voice of God speaking to us in grace, though to the world in judgment, is blessedness. 'Open ears' are the least that God can expect when He speaks. He who has ears to hear, let him hear! The words spoken are so full of God, so full of Christ, so full of the Spirit, that in listening we are blessed. His doctrine drops as the rain, and distills as the dew. 'Blessed are those who hear,' are among the opening words of this wondrous Revelation; and 'let him who hears say, Come,' are among its closing ones. The result produced upon the hearer by the reading of these prophecies should be to make him say, "come!" 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus!'

And 'keep' those things that are written therein. 'If you know these things, happy are you if you DO them.' The 'keeping' and the 'doing' are the consequent of the 'hearing.' The 'keeping' of Christ's word is what is

specially enforced here. For the Revelation is a thoroughly practical book, meant to bear upon our daily life, to guide the Church, to warn kings and kingdoms, to lift us out of the region of the visible into that of the invisible! 'Keep the words of this book' is Christ's message to the Church and the Churches. But how shall we 'keep' them if we do not study the book? Whether we fully comprehend it or not, let us study it. Each perusal will give a new insight into its visions; we shall take on the mold and impress of its truths, even unconsciously, in the simple childlike reading of it.

For the time is at hand. Coming judgments, coming glories, a coming Judge, and a coming kingdom--these are some of the things held up before our eyes. In regard to all these we are bidden to 'watch.' When and how they are to burst upon our world, and to awaken the slumbering church, we know not. The time has always been concealed. It is uncertain. It may be soon. "Of that day and hour knows no man." "Awake you who sleep," for the time is at hand. The trumpet is always ready to sound; the last storm is always just on the point of breaking. Christ is always 'coming.' The end of all things is at hand. Whether we are able to reconcile these words with the delay of so many centuries, it matters not. The words were meant to be words of warning, on account of the suddenness of the final crisis. In looking forward from a human view-point, and measuring the times and seasons by a human standard, the above expression may seem 'hard to be understood;' looking back upon it hereafter from the eternal view-point, we shall see how it was always near.

Here let us stop short and gather up the following LESSONS, taught us in these verses by the Spirit of God--

I. God wishes us to study Christ. Again and again He opens out His 'unsearchable riches,' and gives us another and another view of the 'unspeakable gift.' Study His person; study His work--the wisdom, and the power, and the love of God are there! Study all His fullness, and, as you study it, drink it in! Study the cross; study the resurrection; study the present majesty of the ascended and interceding Christ; study His coming glory as Judge, and King, and Bridegroom. There is none like Him--neither shall ever be. He is the chief among ten thousand; the only perfect One; the all-perfect One; the representative of the invisible Godhead; the doer of the Father's will; the accomplisher of the Father's purpose--both of vengeance and of grace.

II. Christ wishes us to study Himself. 'Look unto me,' He says in this book. Jesus showed to His servant John the things concerning Himself, that the Church in all ages might see and know these things. He unveils Himself in His glory, and says, Look on me! Here Christ is all and in all; and He would gladly teach us here what that all is, and what that in all implies.

III. Christ uses 'human' messengers. He is head over all things to the Church, and He makes use of all things as His servants, saying to one, 'Go,' and he goes, to another, 'Come,' and he comes. Though invisible now and in the heavens, He uses human agencies still. He speaks through men; He teaches through men; He comforts through men; He warns through men. 'We beg you, in Christ's stead be you reconciled to God,' are words which show us how He stands towards us.

IV. God uses 'angelic' messengers. In the government both of the church and of the world He makes use of angels. They are ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation. Jesus comes Himself to John; yet the Revelation comes to John by an angel. How the angel communicated with John we know not. Who he was, whether Michael or Gabriel, we know not. But it is an angelic messenger that is made use of here. This whole book is full of angelic agencies and ministries. God lifts a little of the

veil, and shows us angels at work in conducting the affairs of earth. This is the book of ANGELS--for the word occurs in it seventy-six times. They minister to man; they execute God's judgments; they do His will here; excelling in strength, and able to counteract the power of Satan and his angels.

V. God annexes a 'special blessedness' to the study of this book. Few believe this; fewer act upon it. The Apocalypse is too many like the Sibyl's books, or the Iliad of Homer. The so-called philosophy of the age is undermining the prophetic word, reducing it to a mere collection of figures, or symbolic representation of principles or abstract truths. Prophecy as the direct prediction by God of what is to come to pass on earth is set aside, and the prophetic books are studied merely in reference to their poetry or their lofty ideas. Blessedness in studying them is seldom thought of, even by many Christians. Yet the word of God here stands true. Prophecy is a sure word, and it is as blessed as it is sure. Woe to him who slights it! Blessed are all those who meditate on it, seek to know it, and take it for guidance and counsel in the evil day!

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