

(The Lord and His Church) 1. the Revelation of Jesus Christ

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the Book of Revelation as a revelation of Jesus Christ and the call to obedience for believers.

Scripture: Revelation 1:1

Topics: "Revelation", "Spiritual Evaluation"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the significance of the book of Revelation, particularly the first three chapters, as a divine revelation meant for God's bondservants who seek to understand His will. He highlights that the evaluations of the seven churches serve as a mirror for self-assessment, urging believers to align their spiritual lives with God's perspective rather than their own or others'. Poonen stresses the importance of obedience to God's Word, noting that true understanding comes through submission to His will. He reassures that God's grace and peace are available to believers, and that the ultimate message of Revelation is the triumph of Jesus Christ over evil. The sermon encourages believers to be rooted in the truths of Christ's authority, love, and promise of His return.

Transcript

In this book, we will be looking at the first three chapters of the book of Revelation to see what the Lord has to say to us through them.

Satan hates the book of Revelation because it describes his final defeat and his ultimate destiny. If Satan hates a book, we can be sure it has something valuable in it for us.

The book of Revelation is written especially for those who want to be overcomers in the last days. In the first chapter of that book we see a vision of the risen Lord. In the next two chapters, we see His evaluation of seven churches in Asia Minor. In those evaluations, we can evaluate ourselves and our churches too - if we want to.

The Lord's evaluation of our life can be quite different from our own and other people's evaluations of our life. Most of us have a far higher opinion of our spirituality than is true. If we are willing to be evaluated by the Lord here and now, and face up honestly to what He shows us about ourselves and our churches, we can be saved from a lot of sorrow and unhappiness when we stand before His judgment-seat one day.

Seven Introductory Remarks

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bondservants, the things which must shortly take place; and He sent and communicated (signified) it by His angel to His bondservant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near." (Revelation 1:1-3).

In these first three verses we find seven expressions that are an introduction to the whole book of Revelation.

First of all, this book is called a revelation. The word "revelation" is the translation of a Greek word which means "an unveiling". God alone can unveil His truths to us. This is the first thing that we must bear in mind. We need the Spirit of wisdom and revelation if we are to understand what God is trying to say to us in His Word. Human cleverness can never grasp it.

Secondly, we read that this revelation was given to be "shown to His (Christ's) bondservants". It is not meant for everyone. It is only for the willing bondservants of the Lord.

There is a difference between a paid servant and a bondservant. A servant works for wages. But a bondservant is a slave who belongs to his master and has no rights of his own, whatsoever.

Who then are the bondservants of the Lord? Those who have joyfully given up all their own plans and ambitions, and all their rights, and who now desire to do the will of God alone in every area of their lives. Only such believers are true bondservants.

The Lord has many servants, but very few willing bondservants. God's Word can be understood accurately only by His bondservants. Others may be able to study it intellectually, as one studies a text-book. But they will never be able to grasp the spiritual realities that are hidden in it. Jesus made it clear in John 7:17 that it was only through obedience to God's will that one could know the truth.

Thirdly, we are told that this book was "signified" to John (verse 1 - KJV). This means that the message was communicated through symbols. We read in the first three chapters alone about lampstands and stars, bronze feet and a two-edged sword, hidden manna and a white stone etc. These are not literal. They are symbols of spiritual realities. We need to compare Scripture with Scripture to understand what these symbols mean.

Fourthly, John calls this unveiling "the Word of God" (verse 2). In Revelation 22:18, 19, a severe judgment is pronounced on anyone who attempts to add to, or to subtract from, the "words of this book". There is no book in the entire Bible that contains such a solemn warning.

Every part of God's Word has been given to us "for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness" so that we may become "perfect, and thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17 - KJV).

The three chapters of the book of Revelation that we will be looking at, have also been given to make us perfect. Only those who are interested in perfection in their life will get the maximum benefit from the study of any part of God's Word.

Fifthly, this revelation is the "testimony of Jesus Christ" (verse 2). In Revelation 19:10, we are told that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy". True prophecy will always point to the Lord and not just to events. A true understanding of prophecy will humble us before the Lord and not make us proud of our imagined knowledge of coming events. Even if we are mistaken about the correct sequence of various events in the coming days, if we are not mistaken in our knowledge of the Lord, we would have done well.

Although this revelation unveils "the things which must shortly take place" (verse 1), yet that is not its primary purpose. It is called "the testimony of Jesus Christ". It has been given, not to give us a detailed knowledge of future events, but to show us that the Lord Jesus is in control of those future events. It is the triumph of the Lord that we see primarily throughout the book of Revelation.

Let us "fix our eyes on Jesus" then as we go through this study.

Sixthly, a blessing is promised on those who "keep the things which are written in it" (verse 3 - KJV). This last book of Scripture has been given to us to OBEY. It is blessed to obey any part of Scripture. But the book of Revelation is the only book in which a specific blessing has been promised to those who obey what is written therein.

Even if we don't understand much of the symbolism in it, it will suffice if we obey what we read. There is no blessing promised to those who understand what the symbols mean or to those who can interpret the sequence of coming events accurately. Obedience means far more to God than mere intellectual understanding of His Word. Unfortunately, most believers value knowledge of the Word more than obedience to it.

The food we eat is converted into flesh and blood and bone, even if we don't understand how that happens. It is enough if our digestive system is working properly. So too in the spiritual realm. Knowledge without obedience to God, is like undigested food. It brings death instead of life. Knowledge plus obedience brings life.

Seventhly, a blessing is also promised on those who "read the words of this prophecy" (verse 3) - referring to those who read it aloud publicly and teach it to other believers.

Remember that individual copies of the book of Revelation were not available to believers in the first century. The only way one could hear the message of the book was when it was read out in the meetings of the church. This was why Paul encouraged Timothy to "give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching." (1 Timothy 4:13).

The application for us today is that we should share with others what we receive from God through His Word. A blessing is promised here to all who do this.

Grace and Peace from God

"John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him Who is and Who was and Who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne; and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him Who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood, and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen. 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'Who is and Who was and

Who is to come, the Almighty." (Revelation 1:4-8).

John begins with a prayer that grace and peace might come to them from God.

"Grace" means "God's help offered to us according to our present need". If we need forgiveness, grace can forgive us. If we need power to overcome sin, grace can endue us with power. If we need help to be faithful in a time of testing, grace can give us the needed help. God's grace is always sufficient for our every need.

"Peace" is another great gift of God - peace within our hearts, with no nagging sense of guilt or condemnation; and peace with others around us, bringing fellowship in the church.

The greeting is sent in the Name of the Triune God.

The One Who ever exists in the present, past and future is a reference to the Father.

"The seven Spirits" refer to the Holy Spirit. Seven symbolises perfection in the Scriptures. And the "seven Spirits" refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of perfection. In Isaiah 11:2, 3 the Holy Spirit is referred to as:

the Spirit of the Lord;

the Spirit of wisdom;

the Spirit of understanding;

the Spirit of counsel;

the Spirit of strength;

the Spirit of knowledge; and

the Spirit of the fear of the Lord.

Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity is referred to by a number of titles, which we can look at one by one (verse 5).

The Titles of Christ

"Faithful Witness" refers to the absolute trustworthiness of our Lord in relation to the promises that He has made.

"The firstborn of the dead" refers to Him as the first man to have overcome death and come out of the grave permanently. Others who were raised from the dead before Him, died again. Now that Jesus has permanently conquered death, we need never fear sickness or death anymore.

Jesus is also referred to as "the Ruler of the kings of the earth". Our Lord has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. He controls the hearts of earthly rulers as well. "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes." (Proverbs 21:1).

Our Lord is further referred to as the One "Who ever loves us and has once for all loosed and freed us from our sins by His own blood" (verse 5 - AMP). His love for us is everlasting. And He shed His blood not only to forgive us our sins but also to free us from our sins once and for all. The first promise in the New

Testament is that Jesus "will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). To be freed from sin's power is the great theme of the entire New Testament. No sin can now have the mastery over us, if we live under grace (Romans 6:14).

A Kingdom and Priests to God Our Father

We are told further that the Lord Jesus has formed us into "a kingdom, priests to His God and Father" (verse 6).

The "kingdom of God" is the sphere in which God exercises absolute authority. The church is a representation of "the kingdom of God" on earth - that is, a group of people who have become "one kingdom", because they have submitted to the authority of God in every area of their lives. The Lord has converted an unruly mob into an orderly kingdom - a people who are now being governed by God.

We have also been made priests. Every single believer - man or woman - has been made a priest unto the Lord. In God's eyes, there is no such thing as a special class of people called "priests" in the church. That is an Old Testament concept. Where such a thing exists in any church today, it is leading people back into B.C. conditions!! We are ALL priests.

As priests, we are called to offer sacrifices to God. Whereas in the Old Testament they offered the bodies of animals, today we offer our own bodies to God as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1).

The expression "His God and Father" is similar to the expression that Jesus used after His resurrection, "My Father and your Father, My God and your God" (John 20:17). His Father has now become our Father too. We can now find our security in God as our Father, just as Jesus found His security therein. "Amen", says John (verse 6). And we too say, "It shall be so".

To Him alone "be glory and dominion forever and ever" (verse 6).

Then in verse 7, Christ's return to earth is prophesied. The last that this world saw of our Lord was when He hung in shame on the cross of Calvary. But one of these days the world will see Him coming with the clouds in glory. Every eye will see Him. Those who pierced Him (the nation of Israel) will also see Him. The tribes of the earth will weep when He comes. But we will rejoice. Again John says "Amen". And we also say, "It shall be so!"

In verse 8, God refers to Himself as the Alpha and the Omega, the Almighty and ever-existing God. He was there right at the beginning, when nothing existed. He will be there right at the end of time. There is nothing that can ever take place anywhere at any time that is going to take God by surprise. Our Father not only knows the end from the beginning. Being the Almighty God, He controls everything as well. Therefore we need have no fear whatever concerning the future.

At the end of the book of Revelation, God is again referred to as the Almighty and the Alpha and the Omega (chapters 19:6; 22:13). We could say that the whole book of Revelation is sandwiched between these two statements referring to the all-knowing, almighty power of our God and Father. This is what gives us perfect security, as we read in that book about the trials and tribulations that will befall God's people, and the calamities that will befall the world around us, in the last days.

Seven Glorious Truths

Some of the greatest truths that we need to be established in, during these days, are those concerning our Lord and our relationship with Him, that we have just considered:

The absolute trustworthiness of our Lord's promises;

His triumph over man's greatest enemy (death);

His total authority over everything in heaven and earth;

His everlasting and unchanging love for us;

His freeing us from sin's power;

His Father now being our Father too; and

His coming back to establish His kingdom on earth.

We need to be rooted and grounded in these truths if we are to remain steadfast and immovable in the times that are going to come.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/the-lord-and-his-church-1-the-revelation-of-jesus-christ/>

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