

Revelation

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[0:00] Back in November I said that we're going to be using these afternoon services for at least a while to go over some of the hard books that we don't read a lot of times because we have a hard time understanding them they're kind of complicated and so we avoid them.

But I want to preach on these books and really the goal is quite simple in my mind. It's impossible to cover everything. It's impossible to answer all of your questions. It's impossible to unravel all the mysteries of these different books that we're going through. But I do want you to go away from here saying hey I want to read that book.

And the reason I want you to read those books are because all scripture is God breathed and it's useful for teaching rebuking correcting and training.

So that the man of God might be thoroughly equipped for every good work. You need these books. They're hard to understand but God put them there and you need them.

[1:12] And in these books you come and you meet Jesus in different ways. And we need that. We need new ways, fresh ways all the time as we come through God's word to see more and more of Jesus Christ, to see more and more of the glory of God.

Last time we looked at Song of Songs. This afternoon I want to look at the book of Revelation. So if you could turn to Revelation chapter 1. Now, again, I can't unravel all the mysteries.

It would be the longest sermon of your life. But before I begin, the title of the book is Revelation. Not Revelations.

Of course titles aren't inspired or anything, but the title of Revelation comes from the first verse.

Revelation 1.1 says, the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Now, if you say revelations, I probably won't say anything to you. But inside my head, I'm screaming and I'm saying, it's revelation. That's important to realize from the very beginning.

[2:26] Because revelation is not a hodgepodge of different visions and different revelations all strung together. It's actually a single revelation. Now, we just got done going through the book of Daniel.

And in the book of Daniel, you have a series of revelations of visions. But they weren't really related to each other in at least a direct way. They weren't one vision, one revelation.

They had themes that were connected and ideas that were connected. But they happened at different times. They were different visionary experiences. But revelation is something completely different. Revelation is the report of one revelation.

It presents to you as the reader a whole world, a vision that you enter into. And that's very important to realize. John is going to see all sorts of different things.

And he's looking at different things from different perspectives. But revelation is a world that you live in, that you come into and you enter into. And as you do, and as you learn to live there, and you put your home down there, and you look around and you get used to it, it has a way of resetting your own eyes and your vision of the world that you're living in right now.

[3:44] And it has a way of resetting the way you look at Jesus, at your times, the places where and the people that you're living with, the things that you're seeing. It gives you new eyes.

It gives you a heavenly perspective for what's going on in your life. It's not a world that you dive down into and pull out bits and pieces one at a time. And some people are so interested in certain questions about revelation that they totally miss the point of the book.

So they're so interested in the millennium. They think revelation is all about the millennium. The millennium, whatever it is, it's in Revelation.

It's in chapter 20. It's mentioned one time. And it's not the most important thing in the whole book. Some people are so interested in 666 that that's where they plant their flag, and they totally miss

the point of the book.

Revelation is a whole visionary world that you enter into, that you go into, and that you live in through your imagination. We talked about Song of Songs being a book of imagination, and that's what makes it so hard sometimes for us to know what to do with it because it's a book of poetry and imagination.

[5:00] Revelation is the same sort of thing. Now, that perspective should help you and encourage you to read this book. If you want to read and enjoy Revelation, read it in big chunks.

It was meant to be read in one sitting. That's what the first few verses say. It was meant to be read in the audience before the Church of God.

And so we need to enter into this world, and we need to get used to it and know the geography, know the landscape, get familiar enough with it so that it's not so foreign.

When we went to Ethiopia, you just sort of dropped into this situation, and we were talking about it at lunch. It's just so confusing. Everything is so foreign. That's what Revelation can be like. But the longer you stay there, the more sense it makes.

And as you stay there, you're going to start to see how different passages connect to each other and how different there's roadways in this world. And they go from one thing to another.

[6:05] They go out of the book of Revelation, and they go back to the Old Testament. They go back to Daniel, and they go back to Isaiah, and they go back to Ezekiel. And there's these freeways and highways of thoughts that are just going back, and they're calling on these Old Testament prophets and other things throughout the Bible.

And the more you live in the book, the more you live in the country, you get to understand it. And so that's my first encouragement. See this not as something that you're just going to read it the first time and understand it.

It's a different world, and you're meant to live there for a while. Now, it's not an easy book, but I can tell you from my own experience that it's a great book.

It's a lovely, mind-expanding, heart-cleansing, heart-encouraging book that you need to be thoroughly equipped. It's not like the extra material at the end of the book that if you're really special and smart, you can read it.

It's made for the common people of God to read. And the truth of that is in the pudding. That means you'll find it as you give yourself to the book.

[7:16] You'll find it as you live there for a while. Now, most of what I want to do today is to give you the main storyline of Revelation. Because believe it or not, there's a main story that's happening.

There's a main message that's taking place. But before I talk about that, I want to ask and answer a question. And I think this question will help you to appreciate the book.

And the question is, who is it written for? Who is this book written for? The obvious answer, and the answer that everyone instantly gives and instantly knows, is that it's for the suffering.

It's for the suffering, for the persecuted. And that's true. Revelation is written to encourage the persecuted church. And I wish I had a dollar every time I heard someone say, well, I know what Revelation is about.

It's about Jesus wins. And because he wins, I will win. And that is absolutely true. All this suffering isn't for nothing.

[8:21] It's just not something that we have to live through. In the end, Jesus wins. And in the end, we win. And so that message was meant to encourage the original hearers in their situation.

It's meant to encourage us in our situation. But I'm afraid that's where we start to unplug. That's where we start to lose the grasp of what Revelation is all about.

That's where many Christians stop. They think it's just for the suffering. But that's not true of all.

Well, some of the churches that John was writing to were not persecuted.

At least in an outward way. They weren't having a hard time of it. They were prospering. They were doing well.

The world wasn't attacking them physically. In fact, they had the world by the tail and they were doing quite well. And in many respects, that's us in the West.

[9:20] We don't relate very easily to those who are persecuted because we ourselves are not persecuted in a way that really comes up to what they're going through.

And we're doing quite well in the world. But Jesus has a word for them and he has a word for us. Here we are doing okay in this world.

And it's one of the strongest rebukes of worldliness and materialism that you will find in the Bible. Jesus goes into great detail of how he's going to destroy all these things that people give themselves to.

And they love all the material things. Babylon repeatedly is shown in the book of Revelation as living in luxury. And Jesus is saying, I'm going to destroy all that luxury.

I'm going to destroy everything that you take joy in. And the word to the church is repent. Repent from that materialism. So who is Revelation for? It's for the suffering. But it's also for the prosperous.

[10 : 27] It's for you. Whatever situation you're in. Wherever you are on that perspective. I can't think of the word. Wherever you are along there.

It's for you. Now what's the story? What's the outline of Revelation? That's what I want to go through now. Because I think this will help you more than anything to come as you read it.

To have a few pegs that you can hang things on. A skeleton, as it were. That as you come to this book on your own and you read it.

Again, I'm not going to give you all the answers. But as you read it, you can see how these things start to fit together. So I'm going to allow you. I'm going to give you a few key ideas that you can add on to as you read.

And so I'm going to sort of give you a few stepping stones. As you go out onto this treacherous swamp called Revelation.

[11 : 26] So you don't fall down and lose your way. Give you a few stones that you can walk on as you go out. We begin in chapter 4. Please turn in there. In your Bibles. Revelation chapter 4.

And right now we're just going to kind of go through a flying tour of the story. Chapter 4 is the beginning of this vision.

John enters into heaven. John sees the Lord on the throne. And around the throne is this glassy, calm, crystal clear sea of glass.

So it's this flat, calm sea of glass that's stretched out before the throne. It's like this vast ocean. Vast, calm ocean.

And it's separating the Lord on the throne from everything else. And around the throne are 24 elders.

[12 : 21] Angelic figures. And four living beasts. And they never stop saying, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come. That's a roadway back to Isaiah.

And whenever the living creatures give the glory, give glory, the 24 elders fall down and they worship. And you have this extended symbolic picture.

What is this? What is that picture? It's a picture of the kingdom of God. It's a picture of what it's like in heaven. God is on the throne.

God is ruling. His will is done. And everything is calm and bright. Light. The creation is doing what it was meant to do. It's fully engaged.

It's fully connected to God and worship. Now, it's not like that here, is it? Here, everything is wild and unruly.

[13 : 23] And men are doing whatever they want. And the creation instead of the creator is praised. But here we see a vision of the kingdom of God. And the question is, how will this kingdom, this reality that we see in Revelation 4, how is it going to come down to earth?

And that's the big question of Revelation. How is this reality of God being worshipped, God ruling and everything perfect and beautiful, how is that going to come down to earth?

I know that's the theme of Revelation because that's where we begin. And that's where we end.

With the heavenly Jerusalem coming and God living with his people.

So the question is, how will the kingdom of God fill the earth? Now, John notices in the hand of him who sits on the throne a scroll.

It's a message. It's the revelation. We just read this in Isaiah. The revelation, the vision. It's in a scroll. And it's sealed up. This is the revelation of how God's kingdom is going to come to the earth.

[14 : 32] Now, it's important at this point to see where it's at. It's in the Lord's hand. It's in the Lord's hand. And you're going to see why that's important later.

Now, whose job is it to proclaim this vision? Whose job is it to prophesy and proclaim the word of the Lord?

Well, it's John, the prophet's job. And yet, no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth is able to open the scroll, is able to unseal this mystery.

And so John, this is a personal matter to him. He begins weeping. Because right from the very beginning, if no one can open the scroll, then what he's called to, it's absolutely aborted from the very beginning.

And he longs to speak the word of God. He longs to tell and understand how the kingdom of God is going to come to earth. But he can't. And so John weeps. And he weeps.

[15 : 37] And the angel says, don't weep. Do not weep. The lion of the tribe of Judah is able to open the scroll. And all that's what you hear with your ears.

Then you look with your eyes. And there he is, a lamb who's slain. Why is Jesus able to bring about, to open up the scroll?

Why is he able to bring about this mystery and this kingdom of God on earth? It was because he was slain. He is able to rule because he was slain.

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. And it's the power of God to bring heaven to earth.

To bring the kingdom of God to earth. Now Jesus stands forth and he takes the scroll.

And there's praise. Everything in heaven and on earth, everything and all of creation is praising the Lord Jesus. Jesus, because his victory means their groaning will stop.

[16 : 40] We sang that hymn. Groaning and travel will cease because he reigns. And so the curse will end. The kingdom of God will come upon this blighted creation.

And so all of creation is praising Jesus. It's going to be what it was meant to be. Now Jesus begins.

This is where it gets complicated. He begins opening the scroll.

And seal by seal. There's seven of them. He opens the scroll. And as he does, judgment comes upon the earth.

Now, a fourth of the earth is destroyed, is what it says. The judgments, this is important to realize.

The judgments that you see in the seven seals, that's not what's inside the scroll.

That just accompanies as the scroll is open. It's just what happens as the scroll is open. Seven seals. And then the first six, it's judgment.

[17 : 44] And then in the last one, in the sixth one, right before the seventh, it's cataclysmic. The whole earth is affected. It brings earth right, it brings everything right to the end.

But do men repent? No. You can look in chapter 6, verse 15.

They hide. They run away. They flee. They're consumed. They cry in the mountains to fall on us. They fall under judgment.

But they don't repent. Nothing changes. Now, the seventh seal, and out of the seventh seal comes seven trumpets.

It's one series of judgment leads to another series of judgment. And this time, not a fourth, but a third of the earth. So the judgments are getting worse.

[18 : 42] A third of the earth is consumed. And men die, and they're crushed, and they're trampled by enemies, and they're bitten by snakes. But do they repent?

Does anything change? Does the kingdom of God come to earth when judgment falls? No. Look at chapter 8, verse 20.

I said we're going through this very quickly. I'm trying to give you the key things, the pegs to hang things on, the understanding. Chapter 8, verse 20. The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands.

Judgment falls in new ways, in harder ways, in worse ways, and the people don't change. There's no repentance. Judgment won't make people better.

It won't bring the kingdom. It won't bring about the righteousness of God. Now, chapter 10 comes. And here's where things change.

[19 : 54] A mighty angel, you can see his description, he comes down. And there's a scroll in his hand.

This is a little scroll. Don't be confused. This is the same scroll that we've seen before. It's not a different scroll. It just, the Greek word is called the diminutive.

It's called, it's like the little brother version of the normal word. And so, some words they use interchangeably. Like, so sometimes we say John. Sometimes we say Johnny.

It's the same person. It's just a different form. And this is the same scroll. It's the one that God gave to Jesus.

And you'll see why I'm sure of that later. And this mighty angel shouts. And as he shouts, there's seven thunders.

[21 : 01] So we've seen seven seals. We've seen seven trumpets. And now we see seven thunders. And with the seven seals, there were a fourth of the earth destroyed. And with the seven trumpets, a third of the earth was destroyed.

And so, if we're reading closely, what do we expect to happen with these seven thunders? Well, if we're doing our math right, we should be thinking, now a half of the world is going to be destroyed. The judgments are going to be even worse. But as they thunder, these seven thunders thunder, God says, seal it up. Don't write it down.

In other words, it's not going to happen. These things are not going to come to pass. Now look at chapter 10, verse 10. Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to God.

And he swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the Lord and all that is the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, there will be no more delay.

[22 : 10] What have we seen before is delay. And now this angel says, there's no more delay. Now, if you remember what we just looked at in Daniel chapter 12 a couple weeks ago, this scene should be ringing all sorts of bells in your head.

Because this angel is standing above the waters and the land, and he's raising his hand, and he's swearing by him who lives forever and ever. And in Daniel it says, there's going to be time, times, and half a time.

But now, an angel in the same place, in the same position, swearing to the same God, says, there's no more delay.

We aren't going on forever like we were. We're not going to keep on this process of judgment and judgment and judgment. And he says, but in those days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished.

The mystery of God. That's what was in the scroll that was hidden and secret that no one but Jesus could open. And now the angel takes the scroll, the prophecy, the vision, the revelation, and he gives it to John.

[23 : 22] And John eats it. And it's sweet in his stomach. When Ezekiel was called, he took a scroll, and he ate it.

And it was sweet in his mouth, but it was sour in his stomach. And the same thing happens here. John eats it. It's sweet in his mouth, and it's sour in his stomach. And the angel said, you must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings.

So let's take a second and to retrace where this prophecy, the scroll, has been. First, it was in God's hand on the throne. Jesus came and took it.

And now the angel comes down with it, and he gives it to John. And John now is ready to prophesy and speak the mystery of God.

So you have this path. God, Jesus, angel, John, and then us. Everyone who hears it. Now, listen to Revelation 1.1.

[24 : 26] The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant, John.

So do you see the same path? God, Jesus, angel, John. Everyone who hears. So what is the revelation?

What's the heart of this message? How what's the what's the answer to the question? How is the kingdom of God going to come to earth? And it's essentially the message of Revelation chapter 11. These two witnesses. Now, in Revelation 11, you see two witnesses. We I don't have time to describe them.

They they're like Old Testament prophets. They're prophesying the word of God. And they're able to they're in a position of calling men to repentance. They themselves are in are in garments of repentance.

[25 : 30] And there's two of them because, you know, in the Old Testament world, in the ancient world, you had to have two witnesses to make any statement verified.

You need two witnesses to prove the truthfulness of what was being said. And so here they are. There's two witnesses. This is a picture of the church as it's witnessing to the world. And as they witness and as they call men to repent, what happens?

They're attacked. They're killed. They're eventually thrown down. But then they come back. They're justified.

They're vindicated. And God says, come up here. He's approved of their message. And so as the witnesses witness and as the church goes through these experiences of dying and coming to life and in the martyrs themselves experience death.

As they witness something begins to happen. And this is the key point. Look at chapter 11, verse 13. And at that very hour, there was a severe earthquake.

[26 : 42] And a tenth of the city collapsed. And 7,000 people were killed in the earthquake. And the survivors were terrified. And they gave glory to God.

To the God of heaven. Judgment fell again. But the results are different this time. When men experienced the judgment, they didn't flee this time when the earthquake came.

The mass of them aren't destroyed. Only a remnant is destroyed. And what John does is he takes the Old Testament picture of the remnant.

And he turns it inside out. And turns it upside down in order to make a point. And the point is this. That as the church witnesses, the nations are brought to saving faith.

The kingdom of God comes. Now remember when Elijah was broken hearted. And he was distraught. And he wanted to die. And he felt so alone. And God said, Elijah, I have 7,000 people here.

[27 : 53] Who have not bent their knee to Baal. There was a remnant. And in Revelation, John takes that 7,000. And he turns it around.

And it's just the opposite. 7,000 people are destroyed. And the rest are saved. The rest repent and give glory to God. Only a tenth of the city is destroyed.

In Amos. And in Isaiah. A picture of the remnant is the tenth. Only a tenth will be saved out of this horrific judgment.

But here. Only a tenth are given over to the judgment. In other words. Through the message of the witnesses. As these witnesses speak the gospel.

And call them in to repent. As they suffer for it. And as they stay faithful. The kingdom of God comes. The church leads many to salvation.

[28 : 52] And that's why two verses later. In verse 15. There were loud voices in heaven. Which said. The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord.

And of his Christ. And he will reign forever. And ever. So. What is. The heart of. The message of revelation.

Jesus wins. That's true. But it's more than that. The kingdom of God. In all its glory. And its splendor. It comes to earth now.

As the church suffering. As the church suffers. And yet still. Witnesses to the Lord. Still goes on preaching. Of the lamb who was crucified.

And so the nations believe. The kingdom comes. Now you know enough. To know that that doesn't mean. This world is. This whole world is just going to become Christian.

[29 : 50] That is not what the. What it means. Remember John is painting these pictures. In broad strokes. And he's saying the kingdom. Will fill the earth. Remember Daniel said.

That little stone. Is going to fill the whole earth. He didn't mean that everyone. Now is going to be saved. It's just the kingdom of God. Will cover the earth. And eventually.

It will be the only kingdom there is. That's the heart of. The message of revelation. Now. What happens afterwards.

Is. The church as it witnesses. Is faced with enemies. They're faced with the unholy trinity. Of the dragon. And these two beasts. And. And.

And they faced Babylon. It's called a. Harlot. Because she seduces people. By her. Pleasures. And by her power. And. So the church faces these things.

[30 : 46] And. The rest of revelation. Is showing. How those enemies. Will be destroyed. God will come. And destroy them. He'll destroy them. But you can read about those.

On your own. The important thing. For us to remember. For you to remember. As you read revelation. Is that. The question is. How does the kingdom of God. Come to earth.

And. The big answer is. It will come at last. And finally. When Jesus comes. And he destroys. All of his enemies. And he rules. With a rod of iron. He descends in triumph.

Destroying all of his enemies. But it comes. Now. As we. Count the cost. We don't hold our lives. Precious. We overcome.

By. Our willingness. To suffer. And to speak. For the lamb. The lamb. Suffered. And so he gained his throne. And the church.

[31 : 45] Like its Lord. Will suffer. And as she does. The kingdom of God. Will come to earth. Death. That's a marvelous. Calling.

It's a marvelous. And glorious. Calling. God is being. So gracious. As to make us. Like Jesus. In everything. Even in his.

Sufferings. And so. Read revelation. You're meant to find. Strength there. Supposed to. Reset the way. You look at things.

Is this life. All there is. No. There's. There's heavenly. Realities. Find grace there. See Jesus in it. And see what Jesus calls you to be.

And rejoice. That you have such a suffering. That God's intention is for you. To become like your. Like your savior. And everything. And. It includes suffering.

[32 : 40] But we experience those things now. So that we can have the crown. Later. Let's pray. Our heavenly father. We ask that. You would take all the things that were wrong.

And incorrect. And. Bad. About the sermon. And forgive. Me. And. I pray lord. That you would. For Jesus sake. Lead us deeper.

Into your word. Revelation. Is a. Is a. Is a. Is a hard place. For us to go. It's so mysterious. In some ways. I pray. That you would take us by.

Our right hand. And. Teach us the things we. Need to know. And. And. And. Through that. Through our understanding.

Will you. Conform us. To Jesus Christ. And his image. That we would. Not. Shy away. From counting the cost. But.

[33 : 35] If it means suffering. That we will suffer. If it means saying no. To the material things. Of this world. That we will say no. But in all things. We will. Pray. And live.

So that your kingdom. Will come. That is our great hope. That is our great destiny. That is what you have. Qualified us for. And we just thank you so much.

That it doesn't depend on our broken. And half-hearted efforts. But it depends upon your almighty grace. And I pray that we would be faithful. To you. As you have been faithful to us.

Pray that you would feed us. From your. Word. And I pray that you would encourage. All of us. To not shy away from these hard passages.

But. But to work at them. And study them. And live in them. And so be made. More like our. Blessed and lovely. Jesus. Pray that you would.

[34 : 32] Bless us as we go on our way. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.