

LOOK, HE IS COMING

Revelation 1:1-20

Key Verse: 1:7

Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.

The book of Revelation teaches us in graphic visions that (1) Christ is coming again; (2) the sinful world will be judged; and (3) the dead will be raised to judgment, either for eternal life or eternal punishment. More than anything, it is a book about our Lord Jesus—his love, power, and justice. Today's passage is an introduction to the book. It gives us a preview of Jesus' glorious second coming. May God open our hearts and eyes as we study this book!

I. BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HEAR AND TAKE TO HEART (1-3)

Look at verses 1-2. *The revelation from 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, who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.* The word “revelation” (or apocalypse) means “to bring to light what was previously hidden or veiled.” Who and what is unveiled by the revelation given to us through his servant John? Verse 1 says that this book is the revelation of Jesus Christ. John testifies the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. This book is of Jesus, about Jesus, and from Jesus. It is also about “what must soon take place.” The drama of the unfolding future events is spectacular, but we don't have to fear if we are on Jesus' side. The words of this book were given by God to all believers to encourage them in times of suffering and persecution.

Let us read verse 3. *“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.”* A blessing is promised to those who read this book, and to those who hear and take it to heart. The book of Revelation presents many visions that are described in words. God did not use the technology of multimedia. It is written in the symbolic language of apocalyptic writing, as we see also in the books of Daniel and Ezekiel. Therefore, we must hear the word of God and take it to our hearts in order to see the visions ourselves. It is a difficult book with many symbols of strange beasts, scorpions, and other weird persons and animals. But we should not be bogged down with all kinds of claims and interpretations, but simply hear the word of God as he speaks to us personally. As we study this book, let us not focus so much on the timing of the events or the details of John's imagery so that we may not miss the main message—the love, power and justice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 3 also says that we must hear the words of this prophecy and take to heart because “the time is near.” From the word of Jesus in the gospels we know that no one

knows the exact time of his second coming. It may be today or tomorrow or many years later. The best way to be ready for his coming is to live a life of faith and mission, doing what Jesus told us to do everyday.

II. A KINGDOM AND PRIESTS TO SERVE GOD (4-8)

Look at verses 4-6. *John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.*

The apostle John writes to the seven churches in the province of Asia. However, the number 7 is used throughout this book to symbolize “completeness and perfection.” Therefore, the seven churches here represent all churches of God, that is, the visions in this book were given to all believers. And the “seven spirits” is another name for the Holy Spirit.

First, John gives the greetings of grace and peace from the three persons in God—the Father, who is, who was and who is to come, the Holy Spirit, and the Son Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the first-fruit of resurrection from the dead, and the King of kings and Lord of lords (19:16).

Next, John praises the name of Jesus, our Savior. He says, *“To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”* John says that in his love Jesus freed us from our sins by his blood so that we may serve God as a kingdom and priests. What does it mean Jesus freed us from our sins and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve God? Some people may shout, “Hallelujah, I am free!” when they find out Jesus died for their sins, but then go on to live the kind of life that is not much different from their past life. But John reminds us here that God did not save us at the cost of the blood of Jesus so we could continue to live our sinful, selfish life. He saved us to live a new life according to God’s purpose. Jesus wants us to be a kingdom and priests to serve God. He wants us to serve God, not our sinful nature. He freed us from sin and death, so we are truly free. We now have the priestly duty of bringing the good news of salvation through the blood of Jesus to a sin-sick world (Ex 19:6; Ro 15:16; 1Pe 2:9).

Look at verses 7-8. *“Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.” So shall it be! Amen. “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”* Jesus is coming again. This is the focal point of this book. This should be the focal point of our life. One of these days Jesus will break through the skies, just as he once left this earth (Ac 1:11). He will come

again in his glory. His second coming will be different from his first coming. First time, he was born a tiny baby in a manger. But this time, he will be coming in glory to judge the sinful world. It will be a wonderful day for those who have believed him and suffered for his name's sake. But it will be a terrible day for those who have rejected him. They will mourn because of him. Jesus said in Matthew 24:30: "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory." No one on earth will miss this event. We won't have to find it out from CNN or Twitter. His coming will be visible to all. Even those who crucified him will see him. There will be no place for them to hide.

Who is this Jesus that he will come again in his glory? He is the Alpha and the Omega. Jesus is the beginning and the end. He is the Creator of the universe. All things were made by him and through him. He started everything. He is the source of our life. He was, he is, and he will come as the Judge of the world.

John presents a vision of Jesus who is coming (7) as well as who is already and always here (8). We should look at our life with this perspective. We should live a life of faith and mission each day, knowing that Jesus is with us. At the same time, we should remember that our permanent home is in the kingdom of God. Jesus is coming soon to take us there. We can endure all our hardships because of this hope. What would it be like to have only one of these two perspectives or to totally ignore this truth? If life ends with physical death, hedonism and materialism would be a good way to live. We should say, like Paul argued, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1Co 15:32)--*Carpe diem* and YOLO. But John reminds us that Jesus is here with us today and also that Jesus will come in his glory to judge the world. So we can live each day to please the Lord knowing that he is with us. We can endure present suffering, because Jesus will come and wipe away all our tears. Our constant struggle to feed sheep with the word of God out of our love for Jesus is not in vain because Jesus is coming again (1Co 15:28). Our life has a meaning and purpose because Jesus is here with us and he is coming again. Some people live mainly in the future, eagerly waiting for Jesus' return, and others live a life of faith based on what God has done in the past. But we learn here that we need both perspectives in our life of faith.

III. "SON OF MAN" AMONG HIS CHURCHES (9-20)

Look at verse 9. "*I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*" What was John's situation at the time he received the revelation? He was exiled in the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (9). It was probably during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian (81-96 AD). At that time Rome was enforcing emperor worship, pressuring Christians to confess, "Caesar is Lord" instead of "Jesus is Lord." Those who refused to do so were imprisoned or killed. John, who was an octogenarian, was exiled in Patmos, which was a small (4×8 miles), rocky island in the Aegean Sea, some 50 miles southwest of Ephesus, off the coast of modern Turkey. Apparently the

Empire used this island as a prison. It was a Roman Alcatraz (the Rock).

So John had to work as a slave-laborer in the quarry mines of Patmos. Then what happened on one Sunday? Verses 10-11 explain. *On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."* John was in the Spirit. He was praying on the day of the Lord, and the Holy Spirit was with him. Then the Risen Christ appeared to him in a vision. Jesus had an important message to the Christians who were suffering because of the Roman persecutions. Jesus wanted to speak to them through John who was their companion and brother in "the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance." Jesus told him to write on a scroll what he was about to show him and send it to the seven churches of Asia Minor, representing the whole church of Jesus Christ.

Look at verses 12-13. *"I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest."* In these verses, the seven churches in Asia are compared to seven golden lampstands. What does this tell us about the major function of the churches? The churches are to keep the lamp of God burning.

Among the lampstands was someone 'like a son of man,' dressed in a robe and with a golden sash around his chest. This is an image of the Risen Christ as the High Priest. Jesus appeared as a priest. Jesus is a bridge between us sinners and the holy God. We can approach God through this Jesus who is our high priest. In John's vision, Jesus is standing among the lampstands. Jesus stands among his churches. He does not leave his suffering sheep alone in the midst of their persecutions. He is there in the midst of his suffering people to encourage, and strengthen them, and to give them the assurance of victory.

Verses 14-16 further describe the glorious image of the Risen Christ who is among his churches: *The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.* His head and hair are white like wool, as white as snow, symbolizing wisdom and purity. His eyes are like blazing fire. They penetrate the heart. Nothing can be hidden from them. His feet are like bronze glowing in a furnace and his voice like the sound of rushing waters. The double-edged sword coming out of his mouth is the word of God. "It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb 4:12). His face is like the sun shining in all its brilliance, symbolizing the intensity of truth.

This is a preview of the coming of Jesus. John probably felt like *déjà vu* all over again, because of a similar experience he had had on a mountain. One day, Jesus took Peter, John and James with him and went up on a mountain. There Jesus was

transfigured before their eyes. “His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light” (Mt 17:2). Like the sun, his face was emanating glorious and powerful light. His transfigured face was truly majestic. Then what was the point of his transfiguration on the mount? The purpose was to show his disciples his original image as the Son of God. At that time, Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to die on the cross; death on the cross was on his mind. In addition, Jesus had been taking up the pains and sufferings of God’s flock. He had been rejected, despised and persecuted by the religious leaders. Jesus was indeed a man of sorrow, despised and rejected. He became like a root out of dry ground in order to heal the sick and preach the kingdom of God. But the original image of Jesus is totally different. Because Jesus worked hard as a suffering shepherd while on earth, it is easy for us to have the image of Jesus as a suffering servant. But we must remember the glorious image of Jesus shown to John and us in this scripture so that we may have the light of Jesus in our hearts in times of good and bad.

What was John’s reaction to this magnificent image of Jesus? Look at verses 17-18. *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”* John fell at his feet as though dead. This is a typical reaction of those who personally encounter the glorious God. Isaiah did the same when he saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted. How did Jesus help John? First, he placed his right hand on John. Jesus touched him to assure him of his love. Jesus often touched people to show his love and affection for them. For example, he could have healed a leper without touching the man’s oozing skin. But he healed the man by touching him. He opened a blind man’s eyes by touching him. Jesus touches us when we feel weak and unsure.

Then Jesus said to John, “Do not be afraid.” He told John that he did not have to fear anything because the Lord was with him. Jesus also identified himself with several different names to help John. He said, “I am the First and the Last.” Jesus is the Creator of the universe. He is the sovereign ruler of the world. He sets the boundaries of time and history. Our lives are in his hands. Jesus also said, “I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!” John had witnessed the terrible death of Jesus on the cross. He also witnessed his glorious resurrection. But at times he must have questioned if Jesus was indeed alive, especially when the situation of the church was so bleak as there seemed to be no end of persecution in sight. But Jesus told him, “I am the Living One.” Jesus also said, “I hold the keys of death and Hades.” Death is the enemy of our physical life. Hades (or hell) is the enemy of the spiritual life. Jesus says that he is in charge of both places. John did not have to fear death as long as he was with Jesus. We don’t have to fear death as long as Jesus is with us.

As the Roman persecutions intensified, John wasn’t sure the future of the churches, but Jesus appeared in glory and splendor, reassuring him that he was with them. Jesus encouraged John to overcome his fear by looking up at the glorious, Risen Christ. John remembered the suffering servant. He remembered the Christ on the cross. But Jesus told him to remember him as the Living One. He is alive for ever and ever.

The book of Revelation was written to the churches that were suffering under the fiery persecutions of the Roman Empire. But it is equally relevant for us today. We may not be openly persecuted but are seduced by society into materialism, hedonism and an easygoing way of life. We can overcome many temptations and the fear of uncertain future by remembering that Jesus is alive and he is with us, and that he is coming in his glory.

Look at verses 19-20. *“Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”*

In Chapters 2 and 3, we will study the letters of Jesus sent to the seven churches. We will learn the commendations, rebukes, encouragement and promises of Jesus for his churches—about “what is now.” Then Chapters 4-22 will take us to a journey into “what will take place later.” Let us pray that God may help each one of us to hear the word of God and take it to our hearts, because the time is near. Let’s read verse 7 together. *Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.” So shall it be! Amen.*