

Series: Revelation Recap

Sermon Text: 1:1-6

Good morning church family. It's good to see your faces and hear your voices. This morning, I have the privilege of bringing us back up to speed on where we've been in Revelation so far. Can you believe it!? We've covered the first 16 chapters over the past year. With Brandon staying true to his word about preaching through the Apostle John's gospel and all of his letters, we are in the home stretch. Brandon has also been faithful in NOT telling what to think necessarily, but in giving us lots to think about, which is very pastoral. And one of the big tools he has used to help us stay humble as we work through Revelation has been the 4 main views of how Christians have interpreted this apocalyptic book. They are up on the screen, and hopefully these views and their differences are not new to us anymore, but let's refresh ourselves real quick:

- **Preterist:** This view holds that the events described in Revelation were fulfilled in the past, particularly in the first century AD, often relating to the fall of Jerusalem around 70 AD.
- **Historicist:** This approach interprets Revelation as a chronological account of church history from the time of Christ to the present, seeing the events as unfolding throughout history.
- **Futurist:** This perspective believes that the events in Revelation are yet to occur, focusing on prophecies that will be fulfilled in the future, particularly concerning the end times.
- **Idealist:** This view interprets Revelation symbolically, emphasizing the ongoing spiritual battle between good and evil throughout history, rather than specific historical events.

Did you know that not every Christian holds to the same view? Each one of these four main views is ancient, going back through the corridors of church history, and each of these 4 main views has a mountain of Christian literature behind it. As you

ponder these 4 main views with your people this week, here are a few helpful questions to get the conversation rolling:

- Where do you find yourself in these 4 main views?
- What were you taught over the years?
- What benefit or fruit has your view of Revelation produced in your life?
- Which main view is the most difficult for you to consider, and why might that be?

These four main views help us to stay humble and flexible with the uncomfortable feelings we get when we hear different takes on Scripture and disagreements amongst scholars, preachers, and even our fellow believers. And it's essential that we stay humble and flexible as we gear up to finish Revelation in the coming months, because our own beliefs and traditions very well might be tested and challenged. As we are stretching our theological muscles, let's remind ourselves that Revelation is a book written with many literary styles. The 3 main literary genres are: 1) Apocalyptic literature, 2) Old Testament prophecy, and 3) epistle (pastoral letter). Let's spend some time looking at each of these literary styles so we can better understand and appreciate the mysterious book of Revelation.

Revelation chapter 1 tells us as much. Let's read through *the first 6 verses* for ourselves, starting with *1 and 2: The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.* Revelation is an apocalypse. The Greek root behind Revelation (ap-ok-al'-oop-sis) is where we get the word "apocalypse" which means to "unveil, disclose, or reveal." "Apocalypse is illumination. The veil is pulled back, and the light shows us the nature of what is in front of us, and now we see more clearly" (Solomon p. 173). John included these elements in his opening verse (1:1) where he clearly explained what this book is about. If we Google "uses of the word apocalypse" we're told "It has come to mean the end of the world or a major catastrophe." I wonder: "How can modern

definitions of old words mess with our understanding of what Revelation is actually about?"

The way we read Revelation 1:1 either sheds light or casts a shadow on all that follows, so let's get more specific: "Did John say he was disclosing world-ending catastrophes, or revealing Jesus Christ to those who serve Him?" Frankly, the disclosure of bad news in the Roman Empire was no more "revelatory" than it would be in today's endless cycles of awful news--no need to write a book about that then or now! John was making a far more interesting claim... an angel had pulled back the curtain to unveil hope for God's weary servants by explaining His mysterious interactions with creation through Jesus Christ! Not only does that make the message positive rather than negative, but it also makes the message of Revelation Relevant in Every Era. Hopefully this clarifies that Revelation is much more about encouraging us to stay faithful in the face of suffering and persecution and to continue holding onto our hope found in Jesus Christ. Boy that sounds just like the Beatitudes that Jesus spoke in Matthew chapter 5, especially the last few Beatitudes found in verses 10-12: "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*"

Speaking of prophets, let's turn our attention back to Revelation 1:3, which describes Revelation also as prophetic literature. ***Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.*** Here again, our modern definitions of prophecy don't really help us out. The Cambridge Dictionary defines prophecy as: "*a statement that tells what will happen in the future.*" Words like forecast, predict, and future telling have taken over our westernized understanding of what prophecy is and what a prophet delivers. But when we ask our Jewish spiritual cousins what prophecy is, they tell a different story, a more personal story, a more "*in the present moment*" story. I love how author and theologian, Marty Solomon (p.69-70) describes what prophecy is by describing what the role of a prophet is to the people of God: "*To be*

a prophet is to have something helpful to say. It is to be the mouthpiece of God... they have seen the story of God's people, they have seen it through the eyes of God... and share that experience with God's people."

In our Scriptures, the prophet, be him Jonah, Amos, Zechariah, or any other, spoke to God's people in the voice of an intimate partner, or a close friend. The prophet knew the people he was prophesying to, and in almost every case, he was already part of their community. In the familiar voice of the homegrown prophet, God communicated to his own people in ways that they could understand. So that's the "voice" of the prophet. Now let's talk about the message. This might seem counter intuitive, given our current uses of prophecy, but the prophets were not primarily focused on making proclamations about the future. That was not the main goal of a prophet. Funny enough, it was the pagan world that had such infatuations with the future. While our Jewish prophets very rarely set out to make specific declarations about the future, they did, at times, consider the future and the direction of where things were headed, in order to be very clear about their present times. The focus of God's prophecy was primarily on the hearer's ability to heed the warnings and directions of the prophet for how they ought to live today. God wanted his people to be connected with him in the present, and to focus on their present experiences... not to be obsessing about the future like the pagans.

At the beginning and the end of Revelation (1:8, 21:6, 22:13), Jesus reveals to us that he is the God of the past, and the future when He states, "*I am the Alpha and the Omega,*" says the Lord God, "*who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.*" It's like Jesus knows we worry about the future and we get hung up by the past. Jesus, the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, invites us to be present with him TODAY, to partner with him TODAY to bring more of heaven to earth. If you want to dig deeper into all this, I've listed a few books in the sermon notes that I highly recommend ([Asking Better Questions of the Bible by Marty Solmon](#), [Prophets by Abraham J. Heschel](#); [The Prophetic Imagination by Walter Brueggemann](#)). But to sum up prophecy: God chose a familiar voice and a face to speak to his people about what he wanted them to consider in their present circumstances.

We covered Revelation as Apocalypse, Revelation as Prophecy, and now we turn to Revelation as Epistle or as a pastoral letter. Read with me *Revelation 1:4-6, 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 kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.* Now that's a proper introduction, isn't it? Revelation is an epistle, it's a pastoral letter, written by an apostle of Jesus Christ, to a specific set of church communities, "*attempting to help them apply the gospel to their unique context in that moment in history*" (Solomon p.159). And that's really what the letters of Paul and Peter, James and John were really aiming for: to help their people grasp what it meant to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ right where they were at.

Again, I love the way Marty Solomon (p.161) helps us understand how to handle these ancient eastern pastoral letters: "*When we read the letters, we're eavesdropping on conversations where the apostles taught their audiences how to think, not just what to think... each of those letters was helping [their people] apply the gospel to their unique context.*" We read this literary approach throughout the book of *Revelation*, and especially *chapters 2 and 3*. John addresses seven distinct churches, each with their own dysfunction, problems and hardships. To the church in Ephesus, the church in Smyrna, the church in Pergamum, the church Thyatira, the church in Sardis, the church in Philadelphia, the church in Laodicea. John leverages each of their current contexts to celebrate and encourage their healthy aspects where they're living out God's radical gospel. And John also disciplines and warns them when they have forgotten or missed the mark of Jesus' gospel, so that they would turn from the damage and dysfunction of their ways to partner with God to bring more heaven to earth.

"Revelation was written to a first century church being persecuted by the Roman Empire—to a people who are running for their lives, standing up to the narrative of empire, watching the execution of their brothers and sisters and wondering if it's all

worth it. To them, John uses apocalyptic and prophetic and epistolical literature to communicate a clear message: *IT IS WORTH IT*. You have to overcome because we know how this story ends” (Solomon p.190). I hope you find Revelation to be encouraging and energizing for your own life. I hope that you can find peace in Jesus, as the Alpha and Omega, who holds the future in his victorious and restorative hands. I hope that as we finish **chapters 17-22**, you will act on God’s invitation to partner with Him now, TODAY, because we know how it all ends. In the next few weeks, Brandon is going to walk us through the biggest problem facing the seven churches, Babylon. You are not gonna want to miss the rest of Revelation. And remember, wherever you are on your journey of trusting Christ, you need not work through anything alone. Reach out, and let’s help each other!

Sunday to Monday Connection: Tim showed us how Revelation was written to real churches facing real pressure, and its message still speaks today: Since we know how the story ends, then we know that following Christ is worth any cost.

- **Question:** How is your understanding of Revelation shaping the way you live for Christ today? Is it producing fear and speculation, or faithfulness and hope?
- **Next Step:** Instead of focusing on future things you can't control, ask Jesus to reveal practical ways you can be present in every moment in your home, workplace, neighborhood, or church family.
- **Note:** If you are not a Christ follower and would like to investigate further what all this might mean for you, please come talk with any of our leaders, or the person who brought you.

Takeaways to discuss with your people (in addition to the underlined questions above!):

Quotes related to this passage:

Considerations for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Single underlined sentences are for discussion, while key points are double underlined.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

- [5 Strategies for Reading Revelation](#) from the Bible Project (the first 17 minutes is GOLD!)
- [Heaven and Earth Theme](#) from the Bible Project
- [Other super helpful Revelation summaries](#) from the Bible Project
- [How Revelation mimics ancient Olympic games](#) by Marty Solomon

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