

The Grace of Wrath

Studies in the Revelation of Jesus Christ

Text

Chapter 1:1-8

Topic

Believers troubled by intense persecution - which was only going to get much worse - are encouraged to understand that "the time [of the end is] near"

Title

"Are We Near Yet?"

Introduction

It was originally called Chinese Whispers, but we know it as the Telephone Game.

One person whispers a message to another, which is passed through a line of people until the last player announces the message to the entire group. Errors typically accumulate in the retellings, so the statement announced by the last player differs significantly, and often hilariously, from the one uttered by the first.

By the way: The reason it was called Chinese Whispers is the same reason it is *not* called that anymore, namely, that Europeans were insulting the Chinese language.

I was exposed by some of the saints here to a hybrid form of the game, called Telephone Pictionary, in which a well-known phrase is drawn, then guessed, then the new guess is drawn, and so on, yielding side-splitting results.

Too many Christians, including Bible teachers and commentators, approach the last book of the Bible, the Revelation of Jesus Christ, as if it was a message somehow garbled in its telling.

As we will see, God the Father gave it to Jesus, Who then gave it to an angel, who then gave it to the apostle John, who then gave it to us.

If that sequence was natural, then we might expect some problems interpreting its message.

The process was not natural; it was supernatural. The text was inspired by God the Holy Spirit, given to John inerrant in the original manuscript.

The book will yield its treasures to all those who patiently, and prayerfully, read it and study it.

Our patient, prayerful reading and studying begins today. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Seeing Jesus Unveiled Reassures Us That The Time Is Near, and #2 Seeing Jesus Unveiled Reminds Us That Our Time Is His.

#1 Seeing Jesus Unveiled Reassures Us That The Time Is Near

(v1-3)

Have you ever seen a sculpture or statue presented in a public ceremony? Normally it is covered, or veiled, until the artist pulls the veil off - unveiling it for everyone to see.

This book is the unveiling of Jesus Christ. It pulls the cover off, revealing Him as He is today, and as He will be at His coming, and in eternity.

Jesus, except for one brief moment on the Mount of Transfiguration, was veiled throughout His first coming. He was, of course, fully God; but He was God in human flesh, fully man.

He was the ultimate servant - setting aside the voluntary use of His divine attributes in order to, as a man, live in absolute submission to God the Father, by the leading and empowering of God the Holy Spirit.

He ascended into Heaven and looks a little different.

Rev 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants - things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,

While the book contains a series of detailed visions that reveal many things about the future, that is not what these opening words refer to at all. "Revelation" is the Greek word *apokalupsis* from where we get our word *apocalypse*. As we've already said, it means an *uncovering* or an *unveiling*.

We want to see this book, then, as one, single revelation. We want to see Jesus on every page; in every section; in every sentence.

You might think that's not possible, given the fact that so much of what happens in this book relates to what is called the wrath of God against unrepentant sinners. After all, how can we see Jesus in the wrath of God?

We're calling the series, *The Grace of Wrath*, for just that reason. As we will see throughout this book, in wrath, God remembers mercy. Even and especially during its judgments, mankind is called upon to repent; to believe and be saved.

It may be a severe mercy, but it is mercy none the less, as the Gospel of Grace is preached, literally, to every person on the planet during the time most of the events of the Revelation take place.

God the Father "gave" Jesus this unveiling. Jesus Christ is God, and equal with God, but in terms of function and the plan of salvation, He remains subordinate to His Father's will.

Jesus then gave the unveiling of Himself to an unnamed angel, who then gave it to John, for him to write it down for us.

This unveiling is to "show His servants." The Lord wants us to see Him, as He is now in Heaven, and as He will be at His Second Coming.

It's as if He is saying, "Look at Me!"

Where are *we* looking, in various areas of our lives, for help? Or for hope? Or for satisfaction? Or for purpose? Or for acknowledgement?

Jesus says, "Turn away from anyone, or anything, else; turn and look at Me!"

The believers in the church at Thessalonica were described as having "turned *to* God *from* idols" (First Thessalonians 1:9). Later in the New Testament, John will urge believers to "keep yourselves *from* idols" (First John 5:21).

Is there something, or someone, that Jesus delivered you from, but now you've returned to it? Is there something, or someone, exerting an unhealthy influence upon your heart? Turn and look at the Lord.

"The things which must shortly take place" is often misunderstood to mean that all the prophecies of the book were to be fulfilled soon after they were given.

"Shortly" is *en tachei* meaning *quickly* or *suddenly*. Our word tachometer comes from it. When you floor your accelerator pedal the tachometer redlines. In the context of end times events it means that once they begin it will be pedal-to-the-metal. It doesn't mean they were going to happen immediately, or even soon.

"Signified" can be understood as *sign-i-fied*, or through signs or symbols.

I've heard people say that the Revelation cannot really be understood because it's full of signs and symbols. Stop and think about that for a moment. We use signs and symbols when we want to be clear. Signs and symbols are *better* than language. They are universal.

In this book, the signs and symbols will either be defined for us; or we can easily find them defined by their use elsewhere in the Bible.

Rev 1:2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

"John" is the apostle John, author of the Gospel bearing his name and three New Testament letters. He id's himself four times (1:1,4, & 9; 22:8).

He is content to call himself a "servant." He used the word for a voluntary bond slave - someone who chose slavery out of love for his Master.

He received the Revelation as "the Word of God," given to him by the "testimony of Jesus Christ," **and** he saw it for himself.

I believe he was transported forward in history and actually witnessed what he recorded. If you prefer to think it was a vision, I'm cool with that, too.

Rev 1:3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

Do you want to be "blessed?" *Sounds good to me.*

Then why aren't we reading the Revelation more? Like **every day** more.

In context, "he who reads" is singular. The hearers would not all have a copy of the scroll, so this is a special blessing upon the one who read it out loud. Today, *that's me*.

The hearers are blessed, too, but both reader and hearer are encouraged to "keep those things which are written."

It means to pay attention to them. And it's in the present tense: Keep reading, keep hearing, keep paying attention.

This anticipates that many will ignore or neglect this book. That has been, and remains, sadly true.

John Calvin, scholarly figure of the Protestant Reformation, for example, wrote a commentary on every book of the Bible - **except the Revelation**.

God throws-out an offer to "bless" you to encourage you to read, re-read, and keep reading the Revelation.

Why? Because of what we've already said... And will say again and again. Jesus wants you to look at Him; and He is unveiled, revealed, in this book as in no other.

Not reading the Revelation regularly would be like walking-out of a movie without seeing the last scene; or reading a book and ignoring the last chapter.

I'm not sure how long it would take you to read the entire Revelation of Jesus Christ. You can download narrations of it that are just slightly over one hour long.

Throughout this series, why not read, re-read, and keep reading it? Or listen to it, over and over?

You'll be blessed. **You'll see Jesus.**

"The time is near." It refers to a specific period of time, one that will be described in great detail in the following chapters. We know it as the seven-year Tribulation, whose final three-and-one-half years are the Great Tribulation.

How was, or is, it "near?" Once again, this does not mean it was about to happen. It is "near" in the sense that it is next on God's prophetic calendar.

(We, the church, are expecting the resurrection and rapture at any moment. Being imminent, it's *not* on God's calendar - the one the prophet Daniel gave to the nation of Israel).

How is it reassuring that the Tribulation is near? It's reassuring because we know the Tribulation prepares the world for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

It's reassuring because I know that we win, in the end; and, therefore, all the suffering and sadness we must endure will be worked together for the good.

We're in a war - a spiritual war - against fierce, supernatural forces. They were defeated at the Cross; but they fight on, Satan and his demons, malevolent and depraved.

If you look out on the world, they seem to be gaining ground; they seem to be winning on all fronts.

They might seem to be winning in *your* life - right now.

They're not; or, at least, they won't, because we see the record of their final, ultimate, overthrow and defeat by Jesus Christ as He is unveiled to us.

In the mean time, we can look at Him, unveiled, and He will lead us through the battlefields of our life by His ever-sufficient, all-sustaining grace.

#2 Seeing Jesus Unveiled Reminds Us That Our Time Is His

(v4-8)

After the terror attacks on 9-11, you read or heard stories almost everyday of individuals either enlisting or reenlisting in the military service of our country. We had patriotic heroes from our own fellowship who had retired from active duty who reenlisted to serve.

This next set of verses is a call to believers to reenlist in the service of Jesus Christ. They are a reminder of what Jesus has done for us, and of who we are in Him, so that we will be about His business as history unfolds according to His plan.

Rev 1:4 John, to the seven churches which 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,

There are a lot of groupings of 'sevens' in this book. By the time it ends, we will encounter at least fifty-two of them

Seven is the number of completion. God created the Heavens and the earth in six days then rested on the seventh day because His work was completed.

It is appropriate that sevens are prominent in the Revelation because it is the book that gives us the completion of God's plan for the human race. Everything that began in Genesis ends and has its fulfillment in the Revelation.

The "seven churches" were all in the region we know as modern Turkey. In chapters two and three we will learn the identity of these seven churches.

Notice that this is one letter written to all of the seven churches. It's a clue that there is more going on than Jesus simply addressing seven local, first century churches.

Another clue is that these were not even prominent churches. You'd expect Him to write to Jerusalem; or to Antioch. And there were other churches in that region, e.g., Colossae.

We are to see the seven letters as representing something far greater, something far more complete. As we will see, these letters are written for the churches throughout the age in which we live, and for all those in them.

By the way, notice, too, that Jesus deals with believers as a body; as members of a local assembly that meets together under His delegated authority.

"Grace to you and peace" are so common a greeting we may not think about how remarkable it is to be able to say it.

- "Grace to you" should take me back to the understanding I am totally undeserving of saving - a sinner by nature and by choice. But God has saved me by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
- "Peace" is what I can therefore experience as a human being. I am at peace *with* God and I can have the supernatural peace of God as my companion in the turmoil of life.

John then tells you that each Person of the trinity greets you. God the Father is presented as "Him who is and who was and who is to come." We immediately think of this as describing Jesus because it mentions a coming. But a Jew would immediately and correctly understand this to refer to YHWH. It's a statement of God the Father's eternal existence as the great I AM. Plus you're told in the next phrase that He is seated on His throne. Though co-equal in deity, the Father sits on His throne and Jesus sits at His right hand. So this first greeting is from our Dad.

Next we are greeted by the "seven spirits who are before His throne." This does not refer to seven different beings. Remember that 'seven' is the number of completion. The seven spirits refers to the fullness of God the Holy Spirit.

When describing the Holy Spirit's effects upon the Messiah, Isaiah wrote,

Isaiah 11:2 The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

It is a seven-fold description of the one Person of the Holy Spirit. He's the Spirit of the Lord (1), wisdom (2), understanding (3), counsel (4), might (5), knowledge (6), and the fear of the Lord (7).

By the way... These are the things we need to live a balanced, victorious life. Seek them from Jesus – **not** professionals; and, especially, not from godless professionals.

If we're paying attention, we will see throughout the book that, while there are no direct quotes from the Hebrew scriptures, there are over 500 references to them that help us make sense of the text - like this one from Isaiah.

One of the commentators we like, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, suggests that one of the great things about the Revelation is that it puts the prophecies of the Old Testament into chronological order for us - so that it all makes sense.

Next the Lord, Jesus Christ, is described:

[Revelation 1:5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth...](#)

We see Jesus in His past, present, and future ministries:

1. "Faithful witness" looks to Jesus' *past*. Witness is *martyr*. Jesus came and was faithful to accomplish His witness on the Cross for the human race.
2. "Firstborn" is a word of preeminence. It means Jesus rose from the dead as the first and preeminent Person to never die again. It means others will follow and rise as a result of His resurrection. We live presently in the power of His resurrection as we await His return.

3. In the future the Lord Jesus will be the literal "ruler over the kings of the earth." What follows in this book will explain how that will come about.

Revelation 1:5 ...To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,

There is some debate among scholars as to whether this should read "to Him Who *loved* us," or, "to Him Who *loves* us." Both are true.

We rightfully tell people, *Jesus loves you!* We might also say, *Jesus **loved** you!* He loved you while you were yet a sinner and He proved His love on the Cross by dying for you.

He "washed us from our sins in His own blood." "Washed" can be translated *loosed* and is better understood that way. Sin was your master; but no more. You've been loosed to serve a new Master.

Want a good definition of what it means to be a Christian? You were and always will be loved by Jesus and are loosed from the penalty and power of your sins. One day soon, either through death or at the rapture, we will be loosed from the presence of sin.

Do you consider yourself 'on the loose?' We sometimes describe certain dangerous individuals that way. Jesus has loosed you so you can be on the loose in the world, dangerous in a good way - towards His enemies.

Revelation 1:6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

This seems to be in a prophetic tense. It is understood to be presently true because it will surely come to pass when, in His Second Coming, we return with Jesus as kings and priests.

This book will describe the establishing of the promised Kingdom of Heaven on the earth. We will be active in that kingdom, serving God as kings and priests.

"To Him will be glory" when He is fully revealed at His Second Coming. Then He will have "dominion forever and ever" from that time forward. He has it now; He will fully exercise it then.

Revelation 1:7 Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.

The return of Jesus to this earth is the central theme of this book. It will deal with events leading up to the Second Coming, events accompanying the Second Coming, and events following the Second Coming.

"Clouds" isn't the accu-weather forecast for the day of the Second Coming. It means at least three things:

1. It reminds us of His ascension into the clouds and the testimony of the two men Jesus would return in like manner. This is a real, physical return – not some mystical or spiritual return.
2. A cloud of glory, called the *shekinah*, always shone around God. At His return there will be an amazing light-show.
3. In the book of Hebrews the saints of God are described as a great cloud of witnesses. Many saints will be returning with the Lord.

While saints will return from Heaven with the Lord, many will still be on the earth – survivors of the Great Tribulation. Among every eye who sees Jesus will be "they who pierced Him." It's not limited to the Jews and the Romans who, literally, participated in Jesus' crucifixion.

It's another reference to an Old Testament passage, to Zechariah 12:10. It's a specific reference to the surviving Jews on earth at the Lord's Second Coming. It's a way of letting us know that the Lord will return to the nation that once rejected Him but who have been prepared by the Great Tribulation to receive Him as their Messiah and King.

Why will all the Gentile tribes of the earth mourn because of Him? "All" as it is used here can mean *every manner* of or *as many as*. It might mean that Gentiles from every manner of tribe will mourn – as many as survive who have rejected Him as Savior. You see, they will face His judgment and be cast into Hades to await their final disposition in the Lake of Fire.

"Even so, Amen." It's John's way of saying, *So be it*. Yes, it will be awful for those who have rejected grace and who are not at peace with God. But there is no other way of salvation but by grace through faith in Jesus Christ; and there is no other possible consummation of God's plan for human history.

Revelation 1:8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

"Alpha and... Omega" are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. It's like Amazon's slogan, *Everything from A to Z*.

As if that wasn't inclusive enough, Jesus said He was the Beginning and the End.

With the Revelation of Jesus Christ completing the Bible, you and I have God's entire alphabet and every word He wants to say to us. We see everything in history from its beginning to its end. It spans eternity – from eternity past to eternity future.

Jesus described Himself in terms equal to God the Father when He said "who is and who was and who is to come."

"Almighty" is used ten times in the New Testament and nine of those uses are in the Revelation.

The Hebrew source word for the translation of "Almighty" means *the God of Heaven's armies*. It assures us of God's victory, because who could withstand Heaven's host? But it simultaneously reminds us there is a war going on.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ can have a 9-11 like effect on us, if we will let it. It can encourage us to enlist, or to reenlist, in the Lord's service during His absence, as the war rages on.

You've probably seen the film, *Top Gun*. At the end, while Iceman (Val Kilmer) is in a dog fight with six Russian Mig-28's, Maverick (Tom Cruise) hovers around, afraid and unwilling to engage the enemy.

The scene is intended to make you scream, "***Get in the fight!***"

With the Lord's help to search your heart, ask yourself, "Am I in the fight?"

- "Am I in the fight" against the flesh? It's a fight won for me at the Cross where my flesh was crucified with Jesus.
- "Am I in the fight" against the world? It's a fight won for me because I am seated with Christ and have available to me all the spiritual resources I need.
- "Am I in the fight" against the devil? He was defeated at the Cross, and though he rages on, seeking to devour me and you, nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

We weren't loved and loosed to cruise around as if we were in a private jet. We were put into combat and need to remain engaged against the enemy; and we're to do just that through service and support of the local church we attend.