

THE GRACE OF WRATH

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Text

Chapter 1:1-3

Topic

The apostle John shares the Revelation of Jesus Christ that was given to him as a literal prophecy of mankind's future

Title

"Are We Near Yet?"

I found this travel advice on a parenting website:

When my husband and I buckle in our eight-year-old daughter for a long drive, we make sure she's got lots of movies loaded up on the iPhone or iPad, a nice set of headphones, books, stuffed animals, a pillow and blanket, a notebook and colored pencils, and some snacks and water. Another activity to add to the roster is playing the app Toca Life: City. Created by using suggestions from kids around the world, players have 3 million ways to personalize 29 characters and direct them in a digital doll house, or really doll town, navigating through rooms, customizing hairstyles, selecting their wardrobe, going grocery shopping, and visiting the pet store.

Are you kidding me??

Not in my day. I've twice told you my sad story. How my oldest brother, at the strong behest of my irritated father, threw out the window of our '57 Plymouth my Jack-in-the-Box during our trip from Connecticut to California.

I had that one toy to play with for 2,793 miles while traveling unbuckled in the back of the station wagon surrounded by luggage.

That, my friends, is old school, boy-named-Sue parenting that will prepare you for real life.

The article I read was titled, "How to Avoid Hearing, 'Are We There Yet?'"

**People more-and-more are asking,
"Are we near yet?"**

Scott McConnel, director of Lifeway Research, writes, "The current global pandemic will create interest among churchgoers and nonreligious people about what the Bible says about plagues, disasters, and the End Times. The urgency... is less about stockpiling toilet paper and more about helping people be ready for Christ's return."

"Are we near yet?" Check-out verse three: "For the time is **near**."

We have the answers people need... And many of them are in the *Revelation of Jesus Christ*.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 You Are The Servant To Whom Jesus Is Unveiled**, and **#2 You Are The Servant By Whom Jesus Is Unveiled**.

#1 - You Are The Servant To Whom Jesus Is Unveiled (v1)

Tesla revealed its CyberTruck in November 2019. It was behind a curtain they raised, surrounded by smoke. They drove it out on-stage with fanfare and a light show. It was going great until Elon Musk demonstrated the unbreakable glass by tossing a baseball at it. It shattered. Twice. No matter that they previously hit the body with a sledgehammer doing no damage. It's now considered one of the great unveiling fails of all time.

The Second Coming of Jesus is considered by most nonbelievers as a great unveiling fail

"Where is the promise of His coming?" ask the scoffers.

It's "near." This book gives details about the unveiling of Jesus Christ.

Rev 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants - things which must shortly take place...

"Revelation" is the word *apokalypsis* - *the taking away of a covering*. It's really too bad that this word has come to be synonymous with *chaos* or *catastrophe*. The apocalypse isn't the end of the world, but rather the restoration of it.

In His first coming Jesus was veiled:

*Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail the incarnate Deity
Pleased as man with man to dwell
Jesus, our Emmanuel*

The apostle Paul put it like this: "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8).

His glory was veiled so He could accomplish the work of substituting Himself for our sins.

The apocalypse pulls the cover off, revealing Jesus as He is today, and as He will be at His Second Coming, and in eternity.

In the *Lord of the Rings* universe, the one true king, Aragorn, has many names and titles. He is Strider, Elessar, Isildur's heir, Thorongil, Estel, and the Dúnedain. We come to know him more completely through each of these.

Jesus will be made more known by the many names and titles given Him in this book. Going chapter-by-chapter, He is: "The faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth" (1:5), "The Almighty One" (1:8), "The Alpha and the Omega" (1:8; 21:6), "The Son of Man" (1:13), "The Beginning and the End" (1:8; 21:6), "The Son of God" (2:18), "The One Who is holy and true" (3:7), "The Amen, the Faithful and True Witness" (3:14), "The Beginning of the Creation of God" (3:14), "The Lion of the tribe of Judah" (5:5), "The Heir to King David's throne" (5:5), "The Word of God" (19:13), "The King of kings and Lord of lords" (19:16), and "The Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star" (22:16).

**He is called "the Lamb of God"
no less than twenty-eight times**

Warren Wiersbe says of Jesus' unveiling,

- * In Revelation 4-5, He is seen in heaven as the glorified Lamb of God, reigning on the throne.
- * In Revelation 6-18, Christ is the Judge of all the earth; and
- * In Revelation 19:1-21, He returns to earth as the conquering King of kings.
- * The book closes (chapter 22) with the heavenly Bridegroom ushering His bride, the church, into the glorious heavenly city.

These "things which must **shortly** take place..." This is often misunderstood to mean that all the prophecies of the book were to be fulfilled 'soon' after they were given, as in "I'll be with you shortly."

What if I told you the word "shortly" is *en tachei* and that our English word "tachometer" comes from it?

When you floor your accelerator pedal the tachometer redlines. In the context of the Revelation it means that once the events describe begin, *it will be pedal-to-the-metal.*

"His servants..." That's you & I

I can see the Lord choosing to give His beloved disciple, John, the Revelation.
But *me?* *You?*

Nevertheless, He has given it to **us** through John, on these pages.

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

It's a good reminder to really 'see' Jesus in these odd times we are experiencing.

Where am I looking for hope? For strength? For truth? For clarity?

It should be not just "to" Jesus, but *at* Him unveiled to us in His power and beauty, poised to return.

#2 - You Are The Servant By Whom Jesus Is Unveiled (v2-3)

It's been a White House tradition for decades: A first-term president hosts a ceremony in the East Room for the unveiling of the official portrait of his immediate predecessor that will hang in the halls of the White House for posterity.

Odds are that's not gonna happen this year.

We will be privileged to see many 'portraits' of our Savior in this wonderful book. We'll want to show them to others who have an inaccurate, or incomplete, portrait of the Lord.

Rev 1:1 ... **And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,**

John is the person who received the Revelation and penned the scroll. He is the apostle John, author of the Gospel bearing his name and three letters. He identifies himself four times in the Revelation (1:1,4, & 9; 22:8).

He left us a kind of secret signature. John is the only writer who calls Jesus the Lamb, and he does it in his Gospel and in the Revelation.

He identified himself as a "servant." He used the word for a voluntary bond slave - someone who chose slavery out of love for his Master.

This word "signified" is so important. It can be understood as *sign-i-fied*, meaning *through signs or symbols*.

I've heard people say that the Revelation cannot really be understood because it's full of signs. Stop and think for a moment.

**Do we use signs to be *confusing*,
or to make something *clear*?**

When you see a sign with a blue square overlaid in white with a stylized image of a person in a wheelchair, what do you think? Do you think it means free rides? Meals on wheels?

Signs *reveal* rather than *conceal*. Signs and symbols are better than language in that they are universal and therefore *not* subject to individual interpretation.

Biblical symbols are consistent throughout the Bible. The signs and symbols in the Revelation will either be defined for us; or we can easily find them defined by their use elsewhere in the Bible.

So, Yes, there are some extremely weird images in the Revelation. But we have their explanations. One commentator noted,

The Book of Revelation is rooted in the Old Testament. It contains more than 500 allusions to the Old Testament, and 278 of the 404 verses in Revelation (that is almost 70%) make some reference to the Old Testament.

A first century Jew would immediately understand without need of any explanation the signs we find fantastic

Sometimes Jesus conveyed information Himself to John (1:10); sometimes it was through an "elder" (7:13); and sometimes a "voice from Heaven" told John what to say and do (10:4). Mostly Jesus communicated the Revelation through an "angel."

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 knew that what he was writing was inspired Scripture. He faithfully recorded the "testimony of Jesus," the things Jesus said to him through the angel. He also "saw" the things he wrote about.

(Commentators debate about whether or not John received visions while on the earth, or was in some manner transported to the future to see the actual events. In the end, *it doesn't matter*. What he saw is what matters).

The Revelation is the Word of God... Testified to by Jesus... Delivered by an angel... Given in universal sign language... Visually witnessed by John... And recorded by inspiration. This is iron-clad future stuff.

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.

- * I am being "blessed" right before your very eyes. Today, I am "he who reads... the words of this prophecy."
- * **You** are being "blessed" right before my very eyes. Today you are "those who hear the word of this prophecy."

(BTW: This is the first of seven beatitudes in the Revelation - 1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7 & 14).

What is the blessing? We're not told. Always leave it up to Jesus to determine how to best bless you. But, yes, a blessing is promised - and that is exciting.

We need to read, and hear, the Revelation *more*, not less. I'm not suggesting it is more important than any other Scripture. I am suggesting too many are ignoring it, or worse - teaching it as already fulfilled - and that's not good.

"He who reads" and "those who hear" refers first to the original audience for the Revelation - the seven churches of Asia in chapters two & three. If you look at them in order on a map, they form a route from one city to the next. This entire book was read to, and heard by, all of them. One commentator pointed out,

"Because writing materials were expensive and scarce, so were copies of the books that were parts of the biblical canon.

As a rule, one copy per Christian assembly was the best that could be hoped for. Public reading was the only means that rank-and-file Christians had for becoming familiar with the contents of these books."

You're to "keep the things that are in it." Prophecy is practical. We don't study it because we are curious about the future. When we get to the letters to the seven churches, for example, Jesus will give much in the way of practical obedience.

The original recipients were suffering extreme persecution from Roman emperor Domitian. It was going to go from *bad* to *worse* to *martyrdom*. The believers would find great hope in the knowledge of the return of Jesus to establish the kingdom.

It has become popular to categorize the book as "apocalyptic literature." That sounds right at first, since it calls itself *apokalypsis*. After all, if the Apocalypse isn't apocalyptic, what is?

Apocalyptic literature is a category of writing - what scholars call a genre - like prose and poetry are categories of writing.

- * One of many reasons the Revelation is *not* in the category of apocalyptic literature is that the first three chapters are very much literal.
- * Another reason is that apocalyptic literature doesn't promise you a blessing from Heaven for reading it.
- * Yet another reason is that apocalyptic literature is pseudonymous (σῶο 'dänəmās). Big word that means *written under a false name*. Definitely not the case here.

**But there is a better argument:
The Revelation characterizes itself as prophecy**

We see that here in verse three, and later, in chapter 22:18-19.

The proper approach to the Revelation is to "assume a literal interpretation of each symbolic representation unless a particular factor in the text indicates it should be interpreted figuratively."

If you've ever heard or read a teaching by someone who treats the Revelation as apocalyptic literature, you noted that they ignore the signs as they are defined in the book in favor of their own allegories.

In chapter seven we will read, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred *and* forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel *were* sealed" (7:3-4).

The chapter continues by going tribe-by-tribe saying that 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel were sealed. They were set aside for special ministry.

Who do you think they are?

- * The Jehovah's Witnesses believe that exactly 144,000 faithful Christians from Pentecost 33AD until the present day will be resurrected to Heaven as

immortal spirit beings to spend eternity with God and Christ. They believe that these people are “anointed” by God to become part of the spiritual “Israel of God.”

- * Mormons believe that the sealing of the 144,000 relates to the high priests, ordained unto the holy order of God.

It's not only the cults that contribute to confusion:

- * Hank Hanegraaff, the Bible Answer Man, says, “The 144,000 and the great multitude are not two different peoples but two different ways of describing the same purified bride. From one vantage point the purified bride is numbered; from another, she is innumerable - a great multitude that no one can count.”
- * Kevin DeYoung, writing for *The Gospel Coalition*, says, “The 144,000 are not an ethnic Jewish remnant. The 144,000 represent the entire community of the redeemed.”

There is nothing anywhere to suggest 144,000 is a figurative number, or that these aren't exactly the Jews who John says they are

One more reason we are futurists who read prophecy literally.

Whenever someone in the Bible interpreted prophecy he did so literally

Daniel, for instance, was reading the prophecy of Jeremiah.

He came to the place where Jeremiah indicated that the captivity of the Jews in Babylon would last a period of seventy years. Daniel believed it to be literal. He realized that the time was almost through and set himself to being ready to return to Jerusalem.

“For the time is near.” “Time” here means a certain period of time. We might call it an “age.” The certain period of time is the Kingdom of God on earth for a thousand years.

Consider the following biblical factoids:

- * For every prophecy of the first coming of Jesus there are eight prophecies of His Second Coming.
- * There are over one-thousand eight hundred and forty-five verses in the Old Testament that refer to Jesus Christ ruling over a kingdom on the earth.
- * Seventeen Old Testament books feature His rule on the earth as a prominent event.
- * There are at least three hundred eighteen references to Jesus Christ's Second Coming in the New Testament.
- * His return is mentioned in twenty-three of the twenty-seven books that comprise the New Testament.

The kingdom age was the constant expectation of the Jews. We see it among Jesus' disciples:

- * Before the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, we read in Mark 10:37, James and John "said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory."
- * As Jesus was about to ascend into Heaven, the disciples asked Him, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:7).

How is it "near?" Jesus is in Heaven, poised to return. He's coming. We think it is delayed; but it is "near."

Consider this: When the apostle Peter talked about the End Times, he reminded us that, "With the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (Second Peter 3:8). It isn't meant as a mathematical equivalent, but to say that, from a heavenly perspective, hardly any time has past since the Lord first started dealing with humans in the Garden of Eden. If you only live 70 or so years, several thousand years seems an eternity. If you are eternal, it's a twinkle of the eye.

You likely received many picture cards this Christmas. It's always interesting to see how folks are changing and aging - especially if you haven't seen them for a while. Every now and then, you might not recognize someone. Or they have completely changed their look.

The last time His disciples saw Jesus, He was in His glorified body, ascending into Heaven. Right out of the gate, in verses twelve through sixteen, we are going to see Him very differently portrayed.

I'm hoping we will see Jesus in ways we haven't thought of in a while... And maybe in ways we've never thought of before.