INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION [show Intro slide]

This morning we’re beginning a study in the Book of Revelation. Several years ago, at another church, I taught an in-depth study in Revelation. Out of that study I drafted a book entitled ***Revelation – God’s Famous Last Word***. A lot of what I’ll be teaching comes from this study. With that said, I’ve discovered that every time I study the Bible, even a familiar passage, even one I’ve studied before, God always teaches me something new. I’m looking forward to what He will teach us over the next few months.

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The Book of Revelation is the revelation of Jesus Christ. Rev 1:1 says, “The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave Him…” Revelation contains the words of Jesus, God the Son, given to Him by God the Father, which He then revealed to the Apostle John. John simply wrote down what he heard and what he saw.

Jesus is the central character of the Bible – all 66 books. The 39 Old Testament books establish man’s need for a savior. They look forward to a coming Messiah, the Savior of the world who we find out later in the story is Jesus. The 4 Gospels describe Jesus laying aside His glory in heaven and coming to live among us in the flesh. The Christmas story! God with us! While on earth Jesus reveals His Father to us. Ultimately, He accomplishes His mission of redemption. He bears our sins on the cross and dies in our place. The good news is that Jesus doesn’t stay dead. “He is not here for He has risen!” Jesus conquers death, hell and the grave. [Acts 1:6-11 account of the ascension] The 22 New Testament books between the Gospel accounts and Revelation describe how this resurrected Jesus now gives us, His church, His bride, the power to live transformed lives. We just got done studying one of those books, Ephesians.

In the Book of Revelation Jesus continues to be the central figure. However, here we’ll see Jesus differently than in any of the other 65 books of the Bible. In Revelation, Jesus is the revealed Lord of glory who stands in heaven poised to return to earth as King of kings. With His return in the last days we see that He will render final judgment over a world that rejected Him the first time He came. Revelation deals as much or more with the glorified Jesus as it does with the events surrounding end times.

The Book of Revelation was written to believers. Its theme is found in the first phrase of Revelation 1:7… “Behold He is coming!” As we study this book we learn that Jesus’ imminent return to earth is wonderful news for those of us who know Him as Lord and Savior. If you have placed your faith in Jesus, this book provides a strong sense of expectancy as you eagerly anticipate the return of your Lord. We know how it’s all going to end! Jesus wins! Which means if we are on His side, then WE win! So, in the midst of our various trials, heartaches and in these uncertain times we live, we look forward to our Blessed Hope. Knowing how it is all going to end should change the way we view what’s going on around us.

On the other hand, for unbelievers, Revelation contains not such good news. For those outside of Christ there’s only the promise of impending doom! God’s underlying message for those who don’t know Christ as their Savior is, “Get right while there is still time, because time’s running out!” Rev 1:3 says, “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.” As we’ll see, this book tells us there IS coming a day of judgment! Until that time God’s invitation is open to all, to accept His gift of eternal life, paid for in full by His Son’s death on the cross. This is God’s will for all people. It’s not God’s will “that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

Let me give you just a brief overview of Revelation:

Revelation 1 – This morning’s lesson, tells us where it came from, who revealed it, who wrote it down, to whom it was written and why. We get our first glimpse of our glorified Lord, as Jesus is unveiled in all His glory.

Revelation 2 and 3 – Jesus gives His messages to the 7 churches of Asia Minor. These are 7 direct messages to 7 real churches of John’s day. As we will see, they have application for us today.

Between Revelation 3 and 4 the events sometimes referred to as “The Rapture,” described in 1 Thess 4:13-18, take place. This is what has been referred to as “the secret coming of Jesus,” as a thief in the night.

Revelation 4 and 5 – The scene shifts to heaven where we see Jesus as the One to whom all worship is directed. Here we see the church, the glorified saints of all time, worshiping and adoring the Lord Jesus.

Revelation 6 thru 19 – Meanwhile, back on earth… These chapters, which take up nearly 2/3 of the Book of Revelation, describe the 7-year “Great Tribulation” period. I personally hold to the view that the events of the tribulation will take place soon after the church has been taken out. I’ll explain the reasons why I have this view when we get there. It’s going to be a terrible period of human history where Satan is unleashed and God’s wrath is poured out on humanity. The last half of Chapter 19 describes the second coming of Jesus and the Battle of Armageddon. As we’ll see, this won’t be much of a battle! It’s going to be pretty one sided.

Revelation 20 – Describes the Great White Throne Judgment and the 1000-year reign of Christ on earth, also known as “The Millennium.”

Revelation 21-22 – Describes the new heaven and the new earth. The Bible runs full circle. We see man once again enjoying intimate fellowship with his Creator, just like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden way back in Genesis. Revelation closes with a final word of warning to its readers.

Revelation is one of the most neglected and misunderstood books in the Bible. But it is a book that God intends for us to read, to study, to understand and to heed. Revelation is God’s unveiling of the truth. The words contained in this book are not meant to be some sort of a deep, dark, hidden mystery. I believe God wants us to understand them, at least to the degree that we can. Revelation is a wide-open book that must be explored. So, with that introduction, let’s get started.

CHAPTER 1 – “BEHOLD, HE IS COMING!”

[show Chap 1 slide and discuss picture]

1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants ***[that’s us, His church]*** the things that must soon take place. ***[better translation, “must quickly take place.” Not soon in time, but when the events do unfold, they will happen quickly]*** He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,

2 who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. ***[John writes down all that he hears and sees, how we’re not sure, probably by way of a vision]***

3 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.

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia ***[7 actual churches addressed in Chaps 2 and 3]***: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come ***[from God the Father]***, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, ***[from the Holy Spirit – there is one Spirit who according to Isaiah 11:2 manifests Himself in 7 different ways: Spirit of the Lord, Spirit of wisdom, Spirit of understanding, Spirit of counsel, Spirit of power, Spirit of knowledge and the Spirit of the fear of the Lord]***

5 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 ***[a reminder of what Jesus did for us]***

6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. ***[John’s greeting to us comes from the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit]***

7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. ***[THE KING IS COMING! And when King Jesus returns every eye will see Him. His second coming will be visible. The Apostle John had heard this before when he was the disciple John, one of the twelve. In Matthew 24:30 Jesus had told this same thing to His disciples. Not only will Jesus’ return be visible to everyone who is still alive at the time of His return, but also to anyone who has ever lived.]***

8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." ***[Jesus describes Himself as the beginning and the end of all things and everything in between]***

9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ***[“tribulation” here refers to the persecution of Christians, at this time widespread. John, by now a 90-something year old man, relates to the suffering of the saints to whom he’s writing]***

10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet

11 saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." ***[John is given two instructions – to write down what he sees and to send it to these 7 churches]***

12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ***[later in v 20 we are told who these 7 golden lampstands are, but I won’t spoil the surprise…]***

13 and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ***[“son of man is a term for the Messiah out of Dan 7:13, a term which Jesus used often of Himself, so this is Jesus. And he is dressed in a high priest’s garments]***

14 The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ***[here we see Jesus characterized by wisdom and judgment]***

15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ***[here we see the strength and authority of Jesus on display – His voice is very loud]***

16 In his right hand he held seven stars ***[again, v 20 will tell us who these 7 stars are]***, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. ***[here we see the white-hot glory of Jesus and in His mouth a “sharp two-edged sword,” words of judgment. This is a totally different view of Jesus than how we saw in His first coming]***

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. ***[John is overcome at this point. He is so overwhelmed at the presence of Jesus that he falls down at His feet as a dead man]*** But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last,

18 and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. ***[Jesus reaches down. He tells John, “Don’t be afraid. You have nothing to fear. I have overcome death and hell!”]***

19 Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. ***[Jesus gives John instructions: “John, write down what you see.”]***

20 As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. ***[The 7 golden lampstands represent the 7 churches of Asia. Just as the purpose of a lampstand is to give light, so too the churches receive Light from God and then display that Light to the world. A lampstand has no light of its own. It simply holds up and displays the light it has been given. So too the church has no light of its own. If the church is to be useful, it must display the Light of the world, which is, Jesus Christ. Finally, the 7 stars are the angels of the 7 churches. These are the pastors, God’s men who represent God to the people. Daniel 12:3 used the same analogy of stars to describe men who will lead others to know the truth during the Tribulation]***