

## “Revelation: Revealing or Revolting?”

Revelation 21:1-10, 22-22:5

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In our service today, we will be considering a book of the Bible that I KNOW is very near and dear to your heart... the book of *Revelation*. Oh COME ON... with all of you Biblical scholars out there, are you saying that when you get up to do your daily devotional, or simply need a little ‘boost’ from Scripture, you don’t automatically flip to the back of ‘The Book’ and read from *Revelation*? Nooo... probably NOT. But why not? I mean, I’m sure that you all believe in Paul’s words to Timothy, that **“ALL Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”** (2 Timothy 3:16-17) It does say ‘ALL,’ right? Not ‘some’ Scripture, or ‘the Scripture that we agree with,’ or ‘the verses we understand,’... ALL Scripture is inspired by God, and is useful, ‘profitable’ for teaching and training us ‘servants of God,’ ‘equipping’ and preparing us for the good works God has in store for us. EVEN when that Scripture is not easy for us to understand...

Yes, when we consider the complex, unusual imagery offered in *Revelation*, I think that perhaps the authors of The Westminster Confession of Faith, one of our foundational statements of faith, had this book in mind when they wrote in the very opening chapter, **“All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all.”** (WCF, 1.7) And yet, while there are certainly other parts of God’s Word that are also not ‘plain’ or ‘clear,’ nonetheless we are to be students of ALL of Scripture... which remains God’s gift to us as **“a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path.”** (Psalm 119:105)

As we consider ‘this little light of John’s,’ I would suggest that there are two primary **perspectives** from which to consider this ‘apocalyptic’ form of literature. (As some of you may know, the word “Revelation” translates the Greek word “apokalypsis”, which refers to an “unveiling, removing the cover of something to reveal what has been concealed.”) We can look at this ‘unveiling,’ this ‘Jesus reveal’ in two ways: as a Divine Promise, or a Daunting Puzzle.... As ‘sacred’ or ‘scary’... ‘faithful’ or ‘frightening?’ So for the next few minutes we will consider where we stand in this dichotomy... is the Book of **Revelation ‘Revealing ... or Revolting’?**

Now perhaps I chose a bit too strong a word in **'revolting'**... a word synonymous with ones like 'disgusting,' 'evil,' 'offensive,' 'scandalous.' And yet, as we read through this passage, there were some pretty 'evil' behaviors named, and some fairly 'offensive' consequences for such ways of life: ***"cowardly... faithless... polluted... murderers... fornicators... sorcerers... idolaters... liars..."*** and that ***"anyone who practices abomination or falsehood"*** would be ***"unclean"*** and denied entry, suffering ***"plagues"*** and placed ***"in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur."*** (and I DON'T mean those towns on the other side of Lake Charles, 'West-lake' and 'Sulphur'!)

And while I think I'm pretty clear of the charges of being a 'murderer,' 'fornicator,' and 'sorcerer,' I know that there have been times in my life when I was 'cowardly,' 'faithless,' guilty of 'falsehood' and being 'unclean' in my thoughts, words, or deeds. I am painfully aware of the truth of Paul's words to the Romans: ***"For ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*** (3:23)

And yet the 'scandal' of the Gospel is that Jesus came to save sinners just like you and me. The perfect Son of God given as a sacrifice for imperfect children of God like us. God's **good** triumphing over human **evil**. This book's purpose is not to be **perplexing**, but to show God's **purpose** for our lives. In the words of one commentary, the book of *Revelation* is ***"designed to inform and assure believers of God's final purposes, AND also to increase their longing for God and for the realization of his purposes. ... to REASSURE and to REVITALIZE!"*** NOT, in the words of today's sermon title, to be "revolting", but rather, "revealing" of God's perfect will for the lives of his 'beloved' children.

I know that most often I adhere to that 'time-honored tradition' handed down from so many preachers before me: the famous (or 'IN-famous?') **3-point sermon**. But today, I am breaking with that tradition. For in consideration of a book in which there are so many 'dichotomies' considered...between 'new and old,' 'life and death,' 'good and evil,' 'darkness and light'... I will be considering this passage from *Revelation* from TWO different aspects: what it has to say to us as the **CHURCH**, the corporate body of 'Jesus freaks'... as well as to us as individual **BELIEVERS**. How the future life of the God-followers... both 'plural' and 'singular'... is to look different than it does now...

As we first consider the CHURCH, the collective body of believers, and its call to be that 'holy habitation' of God's people, let us think about WHERE that place is in John's vision. He says that ***"I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."*** (Rev. 21:2) This 'holy city'... this 'new Jerusalem'... this 'bride adorned for her husband'... IS the Church. John (*John 3:29*), Paul (*Ephesians 5:22-23*) and Jesus (*Mark 2:19*) all speak of Christ as the "bridegroom"... making US the bride.

And this 'bride' is not 'ascending a staircase' to its new 'chapel' in heaven, but ***"coming down out of heaven."*** A church in a **THIS-WORLD LOCATION**. John's scene not moved to heaven, but the heavenly city moves to a renewed earth. NOT 'pie-in-the-sky' BUT 'heaven on earth. Our 'perfect church' is not reserved for a final destination in heaven, but to begin right here on earth.

In saying that, we all know that as good as our life together in Christ can be, it is NOT 'perfect.' And we SURE know how 'IM-perfect' the world is... in which we 'live and move and have our being.' But these words of Revelation remind us of the ability of God... Father, Son, and Spirit... to change US, and our WORLD. That the God we worship is NOT only in a future home ***"made not with human hands, but eternal in the heavens"*** (*2 Corinthians 5:1*), but that, in John's words, ***"The home (or 'tabernacle') of God is among mortals. He will dwell (which can also be translated 'tabernacle') with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them [and be their God]."*** (*Rev. 21:3*).

The use of that gathering place for worship, the 'tabernacle,' as the 'home among mortals' John speaks of, points to the importance of the church 'gathered.' As we come together regularly... especially when weather is 'less than perfect,' as it is today), we remind one another that God does indeed 'dwell' IN and AMONG us. In the faces of the saints... yes, YOU... we bear witness to the truth that we are God's people, that He will be with us, through 'thick and thin.'

This being said... that to gather as the 'church' is of vital importance to the 'fellowship of the saints'... we must be careful not to mistake just what God most intends that term 'church' to represent. You might recall what John said about another 'synonym' for the physical 'church

building,' the 'temple': ***"I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb."*** (22:22)

In making 'all things new,' part of that new creation is NOT to substitute the PLACE of worship for the PERSON of worship. While gathering together in our 'temple' here is important, it is NOT as important as our individual worship in the person of our God and Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, through the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As much as we appreciate and speak of coming TO church (both the building and our worship service), first and foremost we are to BE the church... individually, personally, as we go out into God's mission field called the WORLD. As much as we want our community of faith, this people of God (a.k.a. 'the church') to be renewed and revitalized, we must not forget that such rejuvenation begins with each one of US as individual believers... and those that we come in contact with...

There is so much in these verses that I find encouraging for our personal walk with the Lord. I would invite you to go back later on to reread this passage. It is the importance of being into the Word Written... as well as into the Word Incarnate, Jesus... that I believe John is attesting to when he says, ***"Write this (down), for these words are trustworthy and true."*** (Rev. 21:5) As beneficial as it is to hear me, or other speakers/writers, or one another, talk about spiritual subjects, it does NOT take the place of having GOD speak to you through engagement of His Written Word.

And in order to best engage God in dialogue, we need the help of the Comforter, the Counselor, the Holy Spirit... for which I believe John uses the imagery of **water**. ***"To the thirsty I will give water from the spring of the water of life."*** (Rev. 21:6) As you and I 'hunger and thirst' for the righteousness of God, we are 'fed' by our 'consumption' of the Word... 'washed down' by the 'water' of the Holy Spirit.

Along that same 'line,' John also speaks of the ***"river of the water of life" ...*** and that on either side of that river grows the ***"tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."*** (Rev. 22:2) It is through the strength of that same Spirit flowing through us that we 'bear fruit.' Our growth as we are 'grafted' into the 'tree of life' is not simply for ourselves, but to nourish OTHERS as well. As they come to the 'shade' and protection of the 'leaves of our tree,' the hurting and broken

find healing for their weary souls. As you and I continue to seek God in His Holy Word, through the power of His Spirit, and feed others as we ourselves have been fed, we bear witness to John's closing words: ***"His servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads."*** (Rev 22:3-4)

The question is, while we certainly have no problems 'worshipping' God... we can be personally confident that we will one day 'see his face'... but just how well do 'wear God's name on our foreheads?' While we do not face anywhere NEAR the level of resistance to the Gospel that John's audience did... or for that matter, what many of our brethren around the world do today... **how readily do we bear public witness to this private faith we profess?** How do the words of Revelation bring us to 'inspire' rather than 'perspire?' FOR, as one author put it, This book serves "not only to provide **encouragement** to the **relatively few** Christians actually **suffering** overt **persecution**, but also, perhaps *primarily*, to **address complacent church members** who saw NO GREAT CONTRAST between their **Christian commitment** and the **surrounding culture**... to make them **aware** of the **critical situation** in which they live, and the **threat** they face." (M. Eugene Boring, Prof. of N.T., Brite Divinity School, T.C.U.)

John was speaking to 1<sup>st</sup> Century followers of Christ... but also, to TWENTY-first ones as well. Basically NONE of us are truly persecuted for our faith. But we MUST be mindful of 1) how many ARE in the sometimes oppressive cultures in our global communities... and 2) how in many ways, Christian values ARE being threatened even in our 'safe' American society. How 'complacent' have we become about the place our Christian faith has in today's culture? In our greater community of faith, aka 'the church,' as well as in our personal lives, let us resolve to show others that ***"the glory of God is our light"***... and that our ***"lamp is the Lamb."*** As we, servants of that Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, continue to ***"seek his face,"*** may God's truth, as envisioned by John, truly be to others 'revealing' and NOT 'revolting'...

**CLOSE:** As I thought about this passage and its references to 'heaven,' I was reminded of a children's song from my youth: ***"Heaven is a wonderful place, filled with glory and grace; I want to see my Savior's face, 'cause heaven is a wonderful place."*** That 'wonderful place' is not one simply in some far-away future... but one we build in the here and now. The 'glory and grace' that is to be seen in the Savior's face is what others see in YOURS. As you go forth to give others a little taste of heaven on earth, know that you don't go alone...