

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
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## *God and His Calling for The Church*

### **Revelation 1:4-6**

**Keywords:** Revelation, prophecy, End Times, Jesus Christ,

**PowerPoint Presentation included:** None

**SermonAudio Blurb:** In the beginning of this important book John gives a clear reminder to the Church as to Her calling and the reasons for that calling.

#### **I. Introduction.**

- A. Last week we took our first steps into the book of Revelation.
  - 1. I spoke on the challenges of teaching this book.
  - 2. I spoke on various ways people have approached this book to understand it.
  - 3. And finally we looked together at the first three verses of this book.
    - a. It is a revelation that belongs to Jesus Christ.
      - (1) Given to Him by God the Father.
      - (2) Jesus gives it to an angel.
      - (3) Angel to John.
      - (4) And John to us.
    - b. Built into this book is a divine promise of blessing for those who read and obeys or hears and obeys the words of this book.
      - (1) There is much warning in the book of God's divine wrath.
      - (2) And there is the message of the way of being saved from that wrath.
- B. There is much in this book that can distract you as you read it simply because of its genre.
  - 1. Vs 3 says it is prophecy. And this can be confusing for people.
  - 2. But it ought not to be. This is not like a parable, designed to hide and obscure.
    - a. E.g. Matthew 13:1-17.

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- b. In Revelation 1:1 we learned that this is a “revelation” that was given to Jesus. And as vs 3 said, it is a prophecy.
  - c. It is not designed to hide but to reveal. It is not to obscure but to speak forth into our hearts and lives.
  - d. “Ethical eschatology” vs time-lines, date-setting, sensationalism, pursue personal rabbit trails.
    - (1) If you walk away from Revelation without it challenging you and changing you then you were not listening AND doing.
    - (2) When God points us to the return of Jesus Christ it is always connected to our current lifestyle and thinking patterns.
3. Some simple suggestions in dealing with symbolic language.
- a. First, look for key terms that help you determine the meaning of a phrase or term.
    - (1) Like/as. This means that we are not taking what comes afterward in a wooden literal manner.
    - (2) Revelation 1:13-16.
  - b. Second, often the interpretation is given to you.
    - (1) Before you give up trying to understand what is going on, or you decide to come up with your best guess, just keep reading.
    - (2) Revelation 1:12-13 with 1:20.
  - c. Third, let the context guide you in how to approach the text.
    - (1) Too many simply dispense with any attempt to find the meaning in the actual text in front of them and are too quick to find a deeper or more spiritual meaning.
    - (2) What I mean by literal here is simply taking the text at face value in light of its genre.
      - (a) Narrative is not poetry and poetry is not prophecy; but each has its meaning within the text rather than forced upon the text from/by the reader.

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by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

- (b) Example: Revelation 7:4 we should come from the perspective that the 144,000 in this vision is literally that number simply because nothing in the context points otherwise.
  - (c) Example: Revelation 11:8 we should understand Sodom and Egypt, not as those actual places, but rather; as symbols. Why? Because that is what the text says.
  - d. If you practice these three simple points you will find much of Revelation much more accessible and understandable to you.
- C. Some theological “take-aways” from Revelation.
- 1. First, a high view of God’s Word.
    - a. It claims to be the very Word of God (1:2).
    - b. Over half of the verses in this book are clear allusions from the Old Testament as well.
  - 2. Second, not only does it have a high view of the bible, it has a high view of God (Father).
    - a. He is holy (4:8).
    - b. He is eternal (4:10).
    - c. He is sovereign (4:11).
    - d. He is omnipotent (4:11).
    - e. He is true (6:10).
    - f. He is wise (7:12).
  - 3. Third, it clearly points out the sinfulness of the hearts of mankind.
    - a. Over and over the book shows humanity as hardening themselves against God.
    - b. You will find them flocking to a false savior.
  - 4. Fourth, it also clearly points the reader to the key truth that salvation from the wrath of God is through Jesus Christ.
    - a. He loves us, even in our sin.
    - b. He releases us through His death (1:5).

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by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

5. Fifth, if we believe that the bible is God's Word then we must come to grips with a biblical sense of time and history.
  - a. It is linear, moving toward a specific endpoint rather than a cyclical history with no real purpose.
  - b. History is literally in the hands of God and He is sovereignly moving all of creation in the way and direction He desires.
  - c. We, therefore, must learn to live our lives with this sense of His sovereignty and grasp the seriousness of what Revelation tells us will happen.
6. Sixth, we see the fullest treatment of what some have called "The Invisible War."
  - a. Much about the work and person of Satan.
  - b. Demonic activities.
  - c. This takes the message of Ephesians and simply amplifies it.
- D. Today we will look at 1:4-6 and learn who is the author of this book, the person of God, and God's calling for the Church.

## **II. The Author (1:4a).**

- A. John. He identifies himself four times in this book, three in the 1:1, 4, 9 and once in the final chapter.
- B. The over-whelming consensus of the early church is that this is John the son of Zebedee.
  1. One of the 12 apostles.
  2. The author of the gospel and the letters of John.
- C. There are many reasons to accept this and it is of little value delving into the details as most of them are rather technical.
- D. The background to the writing of this prophecy will be dealt with in 1:9.
- E. He gives a standard blessing by way of a greeting, seeking the well-being of the members of these seven churches.
  1. Grace = a distinctive request that God would show His unique spiritual benefit and kindness upon these people.

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

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by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

- a. And grace is much needed by them...and us.
  - b. It is not an empty statement, it goes to the heart of the need for every human, God's grace in saving them, forgiving them, and keeping them safe to the end.
2. Peace = The Hebrew idea of *shalom*.
- a. It is not merely the absence of hardship or struggles. It speaks to the idea of wholeness and well-being.
  - b. More importantly it speaks to something that we only experience in part right now, but what is promised because of the faithfulness of God through the gospel.
  - c. In its ultimate sense it points to when God makes all things new. Sin, Satan and Death are destroyed and forgotten. Creation now functions in its purest and fullest way.
3. So in this simple blessing John conveys our present need and our future hope.
4. It also reminds me that in the midst of troubles and even sin that grace is still to be at the heart of one believer to another.
- a. He has to write some hard things to these churches, even to the point of saying that some of them are ready to be destroyed if they do not repent. Yet he starts still with a blessing.
  - b. He is being faithful to the command of Paul in Ephesians 4 where we are to maintain the unity of the Spirit with other believers.
5. And this blessing comes from the Trinity. . . .

### **III. The person of God (4b-6).**

- A. Note the preposition "from." It is mention three times, once from each person of the Trinity.
- B. The Father:
  1. The eternity of God is found in this phrase.
  2. God stands outside of time— in the beginning God . . . . Time is His servant.

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

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by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

- a. We see this in the Joshua 10:13 where God made the sun stand still so that Joshua could finish off the enemies of Israel.
  - b. Again in Isaiah 38:8 God gave a sign to the mortally ill king, Hezekiah to show that he would not die, but live for 15 more years. The sun would go backward.
3. But how do we grasp something like being eternal? We don't so John uses God in reference to time to show that He is outside of time. He is, was and is to come.
4. Why this attribute? Why not His holiness? His love? His grace?
- a. First, it shows He is sovereign. He alone is eternal.
    - (1) He alone is unaffected by events and the passage of time.
    - (2) For God, He look pierces through to the future just as clearly as the past for He is from the beginning and shall be there in the end.
    - (3) Nothing is hidden from Him and nothing that exists can hide from Him.
  - b. Second, it establishes Him as the one who is going to bring to pass all that John writes. All of history from the beginning to the end is encompassed in God.
  - c. Third, our time is in His hand.
    - (1) What is mysterious and frightening is nothing to Him. Think of all that you do understand, all that confounds you. Though we make plans and declare our intentions, in reality we do not even know what the next hour brings us.
    - (2) And then we consider God and honestly, which of us can say we fully and truly know Him?
    - (3) And so we float through this life claiming to know and understand but in our quiet moments we confess that we know nothing. Yet we love and we serve the one true God, Who is, Who was, and Who is to come.
5. The eternal God is who shall bring grace and establish true peace.

## C. The Holy Spirit.

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

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1. At first it does not look like we are dealing with the Holy Spirit but we are.
2. This image of the “seven spirits” occurs also in 3:1; 4:5; 5:6.
3. There are a couple of views on who are or is the “seven spirits” in vs 4:
  - a. View 1: Holy angels.
    - (1) “Spirits” is a term used in the bible to refer to angels.
    - (2) There is a correlation between the seven spirits and the seven angels of the seven churches.
    - (3) However, never in Revelation elsewhere are angels called ‘spirits.’
    - (4) The key problem would be the making of these angels as equal with God from whom grace and peace is being given. Notice how this phrase is sandwiched between the Father and Jesus Christ.
  - b. View 2: the Holy Spirit.
    - (1) This fits a Trinitarian image that also fits with the blessing from the Father and the Son.
    - (2) There is also a connection to Zechariah 4:1-10 where an image of a lampstand of gold with seven lamps on it. When Zechariah asks the he is seeing God tells him that this is the Spirit of God.
    - (3) ‘Seven’ is the number of completion and perfection and would be a unique way of saying “holy’ Spirit.
  - c. And so grace and peace are to be found coming from the Holy Spirit.
    - (1) He is the “Spirit of grace” in Zechariah 12:10.
    - (2) Repeatedly in the New Testament the Holy Spirit is closely connected to the presence and giving of peace.
      - (a) “. . .the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace” (Romans 8:6).

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

(b) “for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking,  
but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy  
Spirit” (Romans 14:17).

## D. Jesus our Lord (5).

1. Notice the attributes given of Jesus Christ by John in just verse 5, we will see many more in the next set of verses next week.

### a. The Faithful Witness (5).

(1) In the ultimate sense He is the perfect and true witness of God.

(2) The bible makes it clear that God the Father is not ever seen. It is Jesus who reveals Him.

(3) To hear Jesus in the bible is to hear the Father. To watch Jesus act in the bible is to see the Father.

(4) He is therefore trustworthy.

### b. Firstborn of the dead (5).

(1) Colossians 1:18, “He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything.”

(2) It is His death that is the preeminent one. Without it, no other resurrection to life would occur.

(3) This is a declaration of joy and hope. It is a statement of the victory of God in Jesus Christ.

(4) One tells you that there is no resurrection; this life and that is all. Your reply is simply that you serve the firstborn from the dead, death is no longer undefeated but rather; it is defeated in Christ.

### c. Ruler of the kings of the earth (5).

(1) King of kings.

(2) The supremacy that He possesses due to His death and resurrection (cf. Phil 2).

(3) This is Psalm 2.

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

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- (4) This is setting us up for the rest of the book of Revelation as it looks to His earthly reign, His heavenly reign, and His eternal reign where all shall bow.
- d. He loves us (5).
  - (1) Note how this love is not vague, nor sentimental, but a working, acting love.
  - (2) Much like His Father in John 3:16 and Romans 5:8.
- e. He released us from our sins (5).
  - (1) Literally “in” His blood.
  - (2) The blood of Christ was the instrument by which we are released from the dominion of sin.
    - (a) As Hebrews 9:22 says, “. . . without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”
    - (b) This also hearkens us back into the Old Testament where the sinning individual would have to go to the Temple and cause the blood of an innocent animal to be shed because of his sin.
    - (c) It is the great doctrine of substitutionary atonement.
  - (3) Romans 6:20-23—the dominion of sin.

## **IV. God’s Calling for The Church (6).**

- A. He has made us to be a kingdom. (6).
  - 1. This is a completed act.
    - a. Through His death and resurrection Jesus Christ has redeemed His people to be His kingdom.
    - b. This is an act of God the Father as Colossians 1:13 makes clear: “For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.”
    - c. This is the radical change in our relationship to this age and the powers of this age.
    - d. And because of that change it also creates a new calling for us. . . .

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

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- B. We are called to be priests to His God and Father
  - 1. Corporately we are a kingdom, individually we are all priests.
  - 2. “Priests” here has a two-fold aspect to it.
    - a. It speaks of our individual, direct access to God. We don’t need anyone to mediate our access to Him.
    - b. It also speaks to that missional calling that I have taught about over the last few months.
  - 3. We belong to a different tribe, a different kingdom and we are called by God to call to those around us to come, see and believe in Jesus Christ our Lord.
    - a. Priests are by definition a mediator between God and man.
      - (1) Priests take God’s words and commands and rituals and brings them to the people.
      - (2) Priests also bring the needs and the sins of the people to God. They do this through the death of an innocent animal, through the shedding of blood.
    - b. And this is picked up in the New Testament as well by Paul in Romans 15.
      - (1) In vs 16 he speaks of bringing the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ alone to the people of the world as his priestly work.
      - (2) And here we see what the church is to be doing before the world. We are to be mediating the grace of God to those who are lost and broken and without hope.

## **V. Conclusion.**

- A. So the book of revelation is a prophecy given to John by our Lord and then to us.
- B. He promises a blessing to those who hear and who obey what they hear.
- C. John gives us all a blessing that comes not from him, but from our Triune God, who has brought us near through the shed blood of Jesus.

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

- D. But this blessing and this saving work of God is not done merely for our benefit, but so that we might take up the calling and mission of bringing the gospel to those who have not heard it.
- E. Why? Because, as vs 3 says, “the time is near.”

## **VI. Benediction.**

May the LORD bless you, and keep you; may the LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; may the LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.

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## Small Group Questions

- In what ways has Revelation possibly been a mystery to you and how does the suggestions given on interpreting Revelation help?
- CGL you may consider taking time to go through various random passages in Revelation to see if some of the symbolism is made clear.
- Once again we see that we are not called to be a passive people but instead to be continuing the priestly work of our Lord in calling sinners to repentance. So I would suggest you continue to identify people you are building a relationship with for the sake of the gospel and lifting those people and yourselves up in prayer.