

EFC

February 4, 2024

Revelation 1:1-8

“Setting the Stage”

Good morning, English Fellowship Church. My name is Jeremy, and I’m one of the Pastors here. I’m happy to open God’s Word with you, as we continue looking at the book of Revelation. I want to thank Pastor John for focusing us last week on Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world by atoning for our sins with His own blood. As we’ll see even this morning, Jesus’ finished work on the cross is one foundation of our hope.

Let me just remind you of a few introductory items I mentioned a couple of weeks ago:

- God Himself is the author of this revelation
- It was written originally to seven churches in Asia Minor, but with the universal church in mind
- Revelation is an epistle, a prophecy, and apocalyptic literature
- The Old Testament is important to help us understand the symbolism, and while the book is historic it also leans toward the future and final fulfillment
- What should our attitudes be as we come to this important book: humility, expectation, worship

Pray

John G. Patton – missionary

When faced with strong opposition and pressure, we, too, may struggle at times to trust God and continue faithfully with Christ, regardless of the cost. But the call of Revelation is just that: that we trust God, walking faithfully with Christ as His witnesses, no matter what. In Revelation, God will give us much to encourage our faith and strengthen us to walk with Christ, and help us understand just why this is so important.

The prologue to Revelation, which is what we are considering today, sets the stage for the rest of the book.

Illustration: my two daughters helping to set the stage for the drama they were part of; the stage props help communicate the message

This prologue brings into focus some vital things that God gives us to help us fully hear and heed God’s call to perseverance with Christ for all our days. There are four “stage props” God uses to set the stage for the message of Revelation. Let us look at them together.

God sets the stage for the message of Revelation by revealing who He is.

John to the seven churches that 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, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. (Revelation 1:4-5a)

In this passage, God begins to reveal to us who He is.

God the Father: He “who is and who was and who is to come”. God is sovereign and trustworthy today (whatever today holds), as He always has been in the past, and ever will be in the eternal future. This is an important message for anyone facing pressure for their faith in God.

God the Holy Spirit: “the seven spirits who are before his throne”. Seven is a number of perfection, and before the throne is the place of power. Isaiah 11:2 (LXX) and Zechariah 4:2 and 10 point us to this understanding. In Revelation the Spirit sees all, and enlivens the church with power.

Jesus Christ: “the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.” Faithful witness: True in all He says and does, and our perfect example. Firstborn of the dead: He has conquered death and He holds the keys of death and hades, and is the source of life overcoming death for all who trust in Him. Ruler of the kings on earth: Sovereign, reigning one, Lord over the great ones we might be tempted to fear.

Why it matters: knowing who God is gives weight to everything He says, and does, and will do.

Illustration: If a stranger on the street offers to give you the new Supermaxi building, you’d think he was crazy – unless you knew he was the owner and really could do that!

God sets the stage for the message of Revelation by revealing who He is, and that lends significant importance and certainty to all He says.

God also sets the stage for Revelation by affirming His attitude toward His people.

“Grace to you and peace... him who loves us...” (Revelation 1:4 and 5)

Written to the churches (and the universal church), for our good!

Grace – unmerited favor: Good attitude, good treatment and good blessings we don’t deserve.
Peace – wholeness and rightness in our relationship with the holy God against whom we had sinned.
Loves us – God is for us! Love is a verb, by the way – it moves the one who loves to action; this Revelation, and His call upon our lives here is for our good, flowing from His love

Why it matters: if we receive an invitation or a warning from someone we know loves us, we can trust it. If we don’t know the person’s heart toward us, we can’t trust what they say in the same way.

Illustration: Car swindlers

God sets the stage for Revelation by affirming His attitude toward His people, helping us know we can trust Him.

God also sets the stage for Revelation by reminding us of Christ’s finished work.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (Revelation 1:5-6)

The cross was Jesus' decisive victory on our behalf, for on the cross He paid for the sins of all who would trust in Him, and He set us free! He finished the work on the cross – the debt is settled, redemption accomplished. It is already done – past tense! There is nothing to be added to Jesus' finished, saving work.

Jesus has freed us from our sins by his blood! Guilt – removed. Power – broken. Presence – being removed.

We were freed by His blood, when we could not free ourselves, and while we were still His enemies. Grace! And it was only by His blood, by taking our place and dying the death we deserved, that Jesus redeemed us. John 15:13 "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends."

Jesus has made us a kingdom. Citizens live under the king, obeying his rule, and their lives reflect his character. There is a transformation that happens in our lives when Christ frees us from sin and makes us citizens of His kingdom.

Jesus has made us priests to his God and Father.

1 Peter 2:5-9 "...you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.... But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

As priests, our lives are to be lived as sacrifices of worship to God in obedience to Him, for His honor and fame; we are to proclaim the greatness of Christ, who has freed us from sin and death and darkness by His blood. In other words, Jesus has given us new identities as priests, with the honor of pointing others to God in both act and word.

This is what Christ has already finished! In Jesus, we are eternally secure with God, even as we live in a world that feels insecure; we are freed to serve and love God fearlessly, and freed to serve and love others sacrificially.

God sets the stage for Revelation by reminding us of Christ's finished work.

And finally, God sets the stage for Revelation by focusing us on Christ's coming return.

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. (Revelation 1:7)

This is the focus of the book of Revelation: Jesus Christ is coming back!

And when He does, every eye will see Him.

For those who love Him and trust Him, at long last our faith will be sight, and our joy will be complete! Jesus will rescue, and will heal, and will right every wrong, and we will be with Him forever!

For those who have rejected Him, he will be undeniable, for every eye will see Him. So many close their eyes to Jesus, and willfully live like He isn't real, or isn't coming.

But this is like the child who covers his eyes in order to not see what is in front of him; it doesn't change the reality, and they won't be able to deny Him any longer.

All the tribes of the earth will wail on account of Him.

From Zech. 12:10 – for some, these are tears of repentance.

From how the peoples of the earth are treated throughout Revelation - some will wail out of fear.

He is inescapable, and His return is sure. In God's kind patience, today is the day of salvation! If you have never come to Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins and new life, don't think you'll be able to escape Him. He is coming; every eye will see Him. I pray your tears will be tears of repentance now, and not tears of terror later.

And so, God sets the stage of Revelation for us by revealing to us who He is, by affirming His attitude toward His people is, by reminding us of Christ's finished work, and by focusing us on Christ's coming return.

This is not a call to an easy path. To follow Jesus in a world that murdered Him means it will hate His followers, too. This is the narrow door, this is the straight path – but it is the path of life, for it is the path with Christ. God knows we will have trouble in this world as we follow Christ, but He still calls us to follow; He loves us too much to call us to anything less than this path of life. So we are graciously called to persevere, and walk with Christ in all of life. The prologue has set the stage, and given us the perspective we need to have, so we can hear and heed His call. As a final encouragement, God closes this prologue with words from His own mouth (only two times in Rev. does the Father speak directly, both saying basically the same thing), intended to settle the matter in our hearts and minds.

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