

Rev 25-08-20b

We're in Revelation chapter 1 and we are getting a little bit of practical introduction here. We know the author is named John. There has been debate across the centuries over whether or not it is the Apostle John.

I'm convinced that it is. I'll give you those reasons as we move through the text and we will see similarities in language, in thematic content, and so on that will pretty much make that clear. There are very few Johns who could just simply send their name to seven churches and they would all know exactly who he is.

It wouldn't be John Mark. It wouldn't be some other unknown John. Yohanan is the Hebrew original through Aramaic and into Greek.

Hanan is grace and the Y-O prefix is the Lord. So it is the grace of the Lord. This is sometimes thought to distinguish this book as not being John because in his gospel he doesn't identify himself.

He doesn't say I John, but he actually does in his epistles. Some of his epistles he does mention his own name. So people can argue both sides of the thing and never really get to a useful point.

The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him in order to show it to his servants. That's us. We need to know what is here.

God the Father has communicated this message through the Lord Jesus Christ via an angel and the Apostle John to get it to us. I don't know that that's the case with the book of Deuteronomy or the book of Hosea or Malachi or even the Acts. But this book is specifically intended by God the Father to be in our hands and in our hearts.

These things are to be shown to us. So it's a pretty high priority. The other thing is out of the 66 books of the Bible, look at verse 3. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy.

There's no other book of the Bible that contains this promise. If you read this book, if you understand its prophetic import, you will be blessed. Blessed is he who reads.

Blessed are those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep. Does this remind you of something in the book of James? I think James and John, I think this is the Apostle John. I think James is written by his brother Yaakov.

James and John, sons of thunder, sons of Zebedee, those who will indeed drink the cup of the Lord and be baptized with his baptism. I think they are similar in approach. I think they are similar in understanding.

They are two of the three who were given privileged opportunities on the Mount of Transfiguration in the upper room and so on with the Lord Jesus. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep. The one who has my words and keeps them, Jesus said.

He's the one who loves me. Be hearers and doers of the word. Don't be hearers of the word and not doers.

This is right where we are in James. Keep those things which are written in it, for the time is near. This is the second time it is emphasized that the time is near.

Two thousand years, I'm sorry, that's not near. But my last heartbeat, my last experience of this life is not far off. The grass withers, the flower fades.

It's only the word of God that abides forever. And the unfolding of this phase of God's plan is just a few years away for every single one of us. And when we shut our eyes in death and open them a split second later, face to face with the Lord, we are then going to have a heavenly perspective on these events.

Have you ever walked in when someone's watching a movie or watching some episode of a series that they're deeply into? You walk in, you glance at the screen, there's a bunch of unfamiliar people, they're in some sort of a situation and there's stress and there's angst and somebody's running and somebody's shooting and somebody's hiding. And you say, well, what's going on here? Who am I rooting for? Is that a good guy or a bad guy? I'm completely clueless as to why this story is being told. Why? I'm dropped into the middle of it and I have no background.

If this is a telling of Moby Dick, if it's a movie based on the book Moby Dick by Herman Melville, if I know that book, you can drop me in anywhere in that movie and within a few minutes, I'm going to know where we are in the story. You know, here's Captain Ahab, here's the harpoon, you know, here's the thing chomping off his leg. And so you know where you are because you know the story and you can quickly orient, you can quickly adapt and become involved when you know that this is something based on a Dickens novel or something based on some other piece of literature with which you are very familiar.

You can immediately identify characters, situations, challenges, who's the good guy, who's the bad guy, how tragic to end this life, wake up in glory only to be completely befuddled and be taken over to the area where somebody is going to have to try to explain while you're on the sidelines because you're not fit, we're not ready, we're not read into the picture, and all we can do is watch from a distance. And there are people who are going to be horrified. There are many criticisms of the Book of Revelation in our day.

It's too violent. Blood running as high as the horse's bridles, people being crushed to death by stones, and the violence of it is distasteful to people who are very pacifist. And so they want to

spiritualize these things away and say that's just a metaphor for something we really don't want to have happen.

But it isn't real. It's not literal. God would never do that to real people.

It's just supposed to motivate us. So the criticisms of this book have been many. The rejection of it has been profound.

And when that happens, people start by saying this whole idea that there's going to be a rapture, a secret rapture, a sudden rapture, and this is messing up the church. Now you think about this, those of you that are old enough. In 1970, Hal Lindsay, with help from another author, a lady, wrote *The Late Great Planet Earth*.

That was a landmark publication. He looked at the regathering of Israel in 1948. He looked at the 1967 war.

The 1973 war hadn't even happened yet. But he looked at what happened in 1967, and he saw that Israel was back on the scene and that the European powers were gathering. And so he started looking at the prophecies of Scripture and interpreting current events in the light of those passages.

And he put it in the book, and it has sold just tens of millions of copies from then till now. Still selling. About 20 years later, you have those who wrote the *Left Behind* series.

He was the same one that wrote *Spirit-Controlled Temperament*. I think it was Jerry Jenkins, am I remembering that right? And the other guy. But do you remember the *Left Behind* thing? And so they took these notions.

LeHay? Yeah, Tim LeHay. Tim and Beverly wrote *Spirit-Controlled Temperament*. And then Tim LeHay and I think Jerry Jenkins started this *Left Behind* series.

And now there's been, I don't know, 17, 19 books and I think four movies made of it. And tried to picture what would it be like to be on the earth when the rapture occurs and hundreds of thousands of Christians vanish and airplanes crash and taxi cabs hit bridge abutments and so on. And then what would unfold for those who are, quote unquote, left behind? This has sparked an enormous backlash.

And in some cases, rightfully so. Because what is the purpose of this book? What is the purpose of the Revelation? It is to equip the servants of Christ for service and function. We're going to see this in the letters of chapter two and chapter three.

But to say this is a roadmap of world history and the news and current events and this is that and here we go and I'm going to cut a hole in the sheet and jump up and down because the rapture is going to happen any minute was never the purpose of what Paul says in Thessalonians, first or second, what he says in Corinthians about being transformed in a

moment in the twinkling of an eye. And it was certainly never the intent of the book of Revelation. What has happened is because people got very annoyed with excitable people who read the late great planet, who got into the left behind stuff and said, well, the time is short.

There's no point in living life. We're going to be gone any moment. It's the any moment rapture, which is a misunderstanding.

And there is a lot of wrongheaded stuff in the late great planet Earth. There is 10 times as much wrongheaded stuff in left behind. I apologize to anyone who likes one or both of those books, but I'm telling you, theologically, it's horrendous, both of them.

And people were deceived, even in the effort to popularize scripture and its application to the present day, to try to parse current events and history and try to predict national happenings, who's going to go to war with whom and so on. The sensationalism of it distracted believers from the daily responsibility to be a servant of Christ, to individually and in small collective groups, local churches, bear the fruit of the spirit, concentrate on what has God given me on this day, my daily bread. I don't need to sweat what's happening on the grand international stage.

I've got my hands full touching not the unclean thing, pure and undefiled religion that we saw in James, to visit widows and orphans in their time of trouble and to keep ourselves unspotted, unstained, uncorrupted, undefiled from the world. That's our job, not to be excitable. And if you look at the history of excitable people down through the centuries that thought, the year 1800, Jesus is coming back.

Those who thought in 1948, Israel's in the land, here comes the Lord Jesus. Or 1988, a biblical generation is 40 years. So in the year 1988, it's all going to happen.

And people writing books on, here are 200 reasons why Jesus is coming back in our lifetime, misses the point. It doesn't matter where on the calendar he comes back. This is why we're not told.

No man knows the day or the hour, not even the Lord of glory. The Lord Jesus does not know when the father is sending him back. Why? That is not the point.

The point is I've got a set number of days. This is an evening and there's one less day left in my life than I had this morning. There's one less week than I had a week ago.

The time is dwindling as goes the sands in the hourglass. So are the days of our lives. If you ever got sick and had to stay home from school, your grandma was watching the soaps, you know, as the world turns days of our lives.

But that was the catchphrase for one of those shows, the days of our lives, like sand in the hourglass, so are our days. And it is absolutely true. What are we doing with these days? What is it going to matter? Will it count on eternity or not? That's what this book is for.

It is not to prep us for the tribulation. We won't even be here. It is to prepare us for service and function in the present and to, based on that experience, that understanding, be ready for service and function in the ages which are to come.

It is a message directly from God the Father, handed to the Lord Jesus Christ because we are his people. We belong to him. We are his body.

Many times we are pictured as his bride, but we belong to the Lord Jesus. We are unique and separate people. Read Ephesians 1, in him, seven times.

We are in him. And we are here to represent him, to serve him, to be his servants. That's what this book is for.

Not to say, wow, let me flip on the news and see, you know, what's happening in this country or that country. So, if you look at this revelation, what is the purpose of the revelation? Keep your finger here and look back to Luke chapter 2. You want to talk about the revelation of Jesus Christ. What is it supposed to do? Luke chapter 2, verses 30 through 32.

You remember this is in the section where Simeon sees the infant Lord Jesus having been brought to the temple for his dedication. Simeon and Anna, you can look at this passage all day long and just appreciate these wonderful Old Testament saints who were watching for the salvation of Israel, God's vindication and fulfillment of his promises. Like us, we are watching and waiting.

But what did they do? They were at the temple. They were serving. You read the description of Anna and everything that she did.

There was one Anna in verse 36, a prophetess, daughter of Ephanuel of the tribe of Asher of great age, had lived with a husband. And this woman was a widow of about 84 years who did not depart from the temple, but what? Served God. Why was she able to view and see the coming of the fulfillment, the greatest thing in all of human history? And she witnessed it because she was a servant of God.

She served God with fastings and prayers night and day. It was the focus of her life. Coming in that instant, she gave thanks to the Lord and spoke of him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

She spoke of it. She had the Old Testament scripture. She had the prophecy.

She understood. And the Holy Spirit, I think, revealed to her, here he is. Knowledge, service.

She was ready for the revelation of the Lord Jesus. But look at verse 30 through 32. When Simeon takes the Lord Jesus up in his arms, blesses God and says, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace.

You want to understand the plans and purposes of God? You want to be involved in them? You

want to be recorded in the pages of scripture as these two wonderful individuals are? Be a servant of God. You are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles.

How much did Simeon know that this was more than the redemption of Israel, more than the Mashiah and the king of the coming kingdom? He is a light of revelation to the outsiders. Could you imagine what people standing around when they heard Simeon say this? First of all, why are you making over this little baby boy? But secondly, in what way are you thanking God for a light that goes out to the Gentiles? We are the ones who need the light. We need the Messiah.

We need the fulfillment of God's promises. Simeon got it. He understood it because he was soaked in the word of God, just the way Anna was.

A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people, Israel. God is going to glorify himself, Lord Jesus, and he talked about it. One of the few times God speaks from heaven, Jesus says, father, glorify your name.

And the father answers from heaven, I have glorified it and I'll glorify it again. The glory of Israel. And Joseph and his mother marveled at these things, which were spoken of him.

Revelation of the Lord Jesus. You go to Romans chapter eight. And if you remember the architecture of that letter of Paul, Romans chapter eight, you remember that chapter seven and chapter eight, and there's therefore now no condemnation.

You find in chapter eight, you get down to verse 19 of that chapter. Paul says in verse 18, I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory, which shall be revealed in us for the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for what the revelation, the revelation of the sons of God. You have the revelation of Jesus Christ, the son of God.

And in him, the whole creation is waiting for revelation of us as reflections, as constituent parts of his body. All creation is waiting for us to be revealed. My question is, if we get revealed, what are we going to look like? Have you ever been in a public restroom and you thought the door was locked, but somebody comes bursting in and you're not ready for visitors? I locked the door because I knew better.

I was in an antique store and I had an appointment within the confines of that little room. And I went in and I locked the door. Next thing I know, the door is rattling and more and more firmly until this elderly lady got it open.

And in flagrante, there I am. I was not ready to be revealed. Hopefully this is a memorable illustration for you because it's a little embarrassing for me.

Are we going to be ready at the revelation of the sons of God? We love to see the Lord Jesus revealed in his glory, in his righteousness, in his accomplishment, in his power. Creation is waiting for your revelation. What are we going to look like? We need to be servants of Christ.

We need to follow in his footsteps, be conditioned by his example, respond to his commands, serve. Blessed is that servant when his master returns whom he finds faithfully carrying out what he's supposed to do and isn't caught in a terribly embarrassing revelation. Today, we either made progress or we didn't in being prepared for that day of revelation.

Tomorrow, we either will or we won't be better prepared for the day of revelation of the sons of God because it is coming. And those things that were done in secret are going to be shouted from the housetop. The things that we hoped would be hidden are going to be exposed and revealed.

Everything is going to come to light at the judgment. Pray God that when we confess our sins and he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us, there is no remaining clinging dirt. It has been separated from us as far as the east is from the west.

We have been washed in the blood of the lamb that's coming up in our chapter here. Just a few verses hence. The one who washed us in his own blood, that enables us to be ready for this revelation.

This matters. This is pertinent. I can kind of have curiosity about what's going on in Turkey or Israel or Iran or what our president is doing in terms of suing for peace or trying to get parties together and calm things down over there in Europe.

It's fun to watch. But this book isn't designed to help me parse current events. It is designed to remind me that this message counts in my daily life.

You find this in 1 Corinthians 1.7. The very first opening chapter of 1 Corinthians. I thank my God always concerning you, the grace of God given to you by Christ Jesus. Just as this revelation is given from God to Christ Jesus and he passes it on to us, the grace of God, which was given to you by Christ Jesus, you were enriched in everything by him in utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you.

Testimony. This is what is going to land John on the isle of Patmos. He is isolated there for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

The testimony of Christ Jesus was confirmed in you so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for what? The revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Looking forward to it expectantly, intelligently. You know, anytime you got visitors coming, you want to get ready.

I need to dust. I need to sweep. I need to pick up.

I need to put stuff away. Uh, I am expecting the arrival of someone really soon. When the Lord

Jesus is revealed from heaven, we want to be ready.

And this isn't pie in the sky by and by. It is near. It is Tarkus.

It is going to shortly take place. That's first Corinthians one, seven, second Thessalonians chapter one, verse seven. It's interesting.

There are three different one, seven passages. Uh, first Peter one, seven is the other first Corinthians one, seven, second Thessalonians one, seven. It is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation, those who trouble you and to give you who are troubled rest with us.

When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, they'll be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power. When he comes in that day to be glorified in his saints, his sanctified ones, we want that to be us and to be admired among all those who believe because our testimony among you was believed. This is the testimony of John.

He has been bearing witness and bearing testimony. That's why he is exiled to Patmos. He's going to tell us a couple of verses.

Hence he's there because he's been bearing witness. He's the author of the gospel of John. He's the author of the epistles of first, second, and third John.

And by bearing witness to what his eyes have seen and what his hands have handled and encouraging believers to faithfulness and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, he's a threat. And he's exiled for the testimony of Jesus Christ. We want to believe that testimony.

Paul bore witness, Timothy bears witness to his congregation in Ephesus and so on. Therefore we pray always for you that our God will count you worthy of this calling and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness and the work of faith with power that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you. What other point is there to life than to reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus and have his name that we bear glorified in us according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's 2 Thessalonians 1.7. You can flip over to 1 Peter 1.7. Peter understood this when he says that the genuineness of your faith being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire. This is what we've seen in James chapter 1. Very same thing. And we've come to this passage.

Precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire may be found to praise, honor, and glory. When? At the revelation of Jesus Christ. That's what John is talking about here.

We want to be ready. We want to understand. We want to have been read into God's plans and purposes.

The culmination of all of human history that has been transmitted to us in this wonderful book. The revelation of Jesus Christ. And at that revelation, that's what we're aiming for.

It isn't that you may not be embarrassed as you hang suspended in space for a couple of thousand years until human history finally ends, and you hear the voice say, go down and jump into the grave so that you can be the dead that rise first and meet the Lord in the air. There is no biblical basis for suspended souls. That would not be tacus.

But any of us could clutch our chest and be gone. And the very next thing is going to be everything that's in the book of Revelation. The revelation of the Lord Jesus.

Are we ready? Are we making ourselves ready? Are we good stewards of our time? Are we looking for that blessed hope and glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus? And we'll be ready on that day. That's the purpose of revelation. It's not to get everybody excited.

Excitement feeds into emotion. Emotion feeds into hilarity. And you end up with people who get so distracted by things like the late great planet earth and left behind, they neglect the daily opportunities that will actually glorify God and actually prepare us for service and function.

The society has roundly condemned those who got rapture-itis and said, well, we don't need to do evangelism anymore. The Lord's going to be back. And these people are on their own.

We don't need to exploit opportunities to look out for widows and orphans in their affliction or to pursue personal holiness unspotted by the world. I'm going to sell some stuff and leave a message and put a VHS tape in my player so that somebody who's left behind can hear me say, see there, I told you the rapture was going to happen. So much distraction.

And there is rightful criticism. Here's what happened. Because of that misunderstanding, because of that misapplication, because of that distortion and perversion of the passages that genuinely talk about the rapture, that genuinely reflect the difference in dispensations, premillennial dispensationalism, which is what we believe, got thrown out with that bathwater.

And people said, see, these rapture people that think they're going to go up before the tribulation and come back for the millennial kingdom, they're all wet. Look at the fruit. The fruit of their lives is poor.

They're distracted. They're uninterested. They don't have mercy.

They don't have love. They don't have true religion, as James communicates it. They're all a dither.

They want to see when's the next left behind book going to come out. And their theology comes out of fictional novels instead of the word of God. It comes out of cherry picking and making immediate application out of Late Great Planet Earth and Satan is Alive and Well and other books of that ilk that began in that time when there was a lot going on in the world.

And anything to deceive, anything to deflect, anything to distract from the opportunity we have to be ready to reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus at His revelation. We have to be careful to respond to the purpose for this revelation. It is to prepare us as all scripture being inspired and profitable for what? Doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness.

And the sort of prophecy mania that ensued has occurred across the years, across the centuries in the church. But with the advent of published media and videos and movies, people confuse the story they are reading or seeing with Biblical truth. There is an equally important need for discernment when it comes to movies like The Passion of the Christ or the series of The Chosen.

These fictional representations may be quote unquote based on a true story, but they are not the truth. Jonathan Rumi is not Jesus and praying with him on an app doesn't get you any closer to heaven. But so many people think it does.

So many people think, well, that's probably how it happened. Look at this story. It is not scripture.

It is not alive and powerful. The Holy Spirit doesn't enable and empower us through details of a story. And oh, isn't it sad that Matthew was autistic or isn't it sad that this guy had a limp or that guy had personal problems and Peter and his wife were having difficulties.

It is a distraction. I'm against it personally. You can watch to be aware of the cross currents in our culture, whether it's Christian culture or American culture or international culture.

Awareness is one thing, but to be invested in it or to think, well, this is now somehow my Bible, we make the same mistake. And with that, anyone with a discerning eye says Christianity is bunk. This excitement is unwarranted.

And in the meantime, the poor are going hungry and the lost are unevangelized and personal holiness is not being pursued by these people that are down there trying to get somebody to sign a book or they're binge watching this series or this set of movies. And in the meantime, their personal holiness is in the toilet. We are called to be ready.

There is going to be a revelation of us coincident with the revelation of the Lord Jesus. So we want to be prepared. And that's what this book is going to do.

It is a wonderful thing. And the genuineness of our precious faith, it's more precious than gold. What? Not our knowledge, not our expectation.

It's our faith, our claiming of God's promises, laying hold of righteousness by faith, being obedient, being Simeon, being Anna. So wonderful that God put an old man and an old woman down there who had spent their lives in anticipation of one day of revelation. And they were ready.

And their words are eternally recorded in the pages of Scripture. A lifetime of preparation for a

few minutes to see the Christ child. And God honored it.

God edifies us, even at this distance in time, through the faithfulness of those individuals and many others like them. Well, this is our introduction. We're already a verse into our book.

He sent and signified it by his angel to his servant, John. We'll pick up looking at this angel. He recurs throughout the book.

The role of angels, as you will remember, is quite significant. Is there a difference in a heavenly angel and an earthly messenger? You realize in chapter two and three that that is the case. Seven spirits that are before the throne.

The wonderful picture of the Lord Jesus we have coming up in this chapter is so meaningful and so motivating. That's what we'll see next time. But we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you that you have seen fit to not leave us orphans as you call the Lord Jesus back to your presence and seat him at your right hand. You have sent us your spirit and you have made available to us the wonderful revelation throughout your word and especially this book. We pray that as we reflect on it, as we remember that even though we are free, we are slaves of the Lord Jesus, even as we are limited and bound by physical, emotional, mental, and even spiritual circumstance, we are free in Christ.

We pray the Holy Spirit will enable us to exploit these opportunities, that we can be found faithful, that when creation witnesses the revelation of us as your children, it will be glorious. It will be to the praise, honor, and glory of the name of our Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.