

Rev 25-09-03a

Greetings, this is the 3rd of September, 2025. We resume our study in the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. We'll take a moment to ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship to give us a chance to focus our concentration, cultivate the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, all important to our understanding, our application, our ability to redeem this time and make good use of it.

Shall we pray? Father, how thankful we are for this time of gathering to receive the benefits of Christian fellowship, the gifts that you've distributed, the brotherly love that we both express and receive. We thank you for the Lord Jesus who has made this life possible for us to transcend the temporal and the short-term and the immediate and begin to enter into eternal life. We pray that as we prosecute our study this evening, that your Holy Spirit will help us to receive that truth that was intended for our benefit in this passage, that in all things our Lord Jesus will be glorified.

We ask it in his name. Amen. We saw last time by pretty much diving straight in here that this revelation, this final book of the Bible is a witness from God the Father to the Lord Jesus Christ, from the Lord Jesus to a messenger angel who brings it to John, the apostle, who then transmits it directly to the occupants, the residents, the members of the fellowships of these seven churches.

Now, I have a question for you. If you were going to do this, what churches would you send this message to? Who should be in this list of seven churches? The only one that you really recognize is Ephesus, the first one. But the rest of these, why would Thyatira get a message and not these more well-known churches? This tells us something that we're going to note in terms of what is the purpose of this book, the purpose of this revelation, what is it for? And as you know, there are many different approaches.

There is the preterist. They believe that John wrote this early, during the reign of Nero in the 60s, not the 90s, A.D. 60-something, before the destruction of Jerusalem, and that he is warning these individuals about impending judgment, and it's going to be fulfilled in 70 A.D. Among many other things that you can say about that, what was my initial question? Where is Jerusalem in the list? If you think anybody would need to be warned about the judgment to come, wouldn't you send a note to Jerusalem and say, Remember when I said you see the abomination fleet of the hills? You might want to review your notes on that, because judgment is coming here in just a few years to Israel, to Judea, to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is nowhere to be found in here.

So, we want to be observant, not only of what is here, but what isn't here. There are many today who want to construct this book to be an encouragement to dissident discipleship. There's specifically a book that uses this phrase, Revelation for the Rest of Us, by Scott McKnight.

His book on Revelation is divided into five parts, and the fourth and fifth parts are the So What section. What should you do having studied the book of Revelation? What is its purpose? What did the Lord Jesus intend for it to do? We'll talk about that briefly. But here in chapter 1, verse 1 and 2, Revelation of Jesus Christ, God gave it to him to show his servants.

We talked last time, two weeks ago, about what it is to be a servant. Do we qualify? Are we ready for this message? Are we, in fact, functioning as genuine servants of God and servants of Christ? What does that mean? This means that individually, this is not a service core, this is not a group message, it's individual, his servants, individually. We, as individuals, take this on board.

Very important for us to understand that what Jesus is about to reveal here, from his Father to us, is individually applicable to us. And this is why you find in these seven letters, at the end, let he that has an ear hear what the Spirit says to whom? The churches. Everyone with an ear should hear everything that is said to all of the churches.

Chapter 2 and 3, call to the servants of God, the servants of Christ, to pay attention for specific reasons. There are specific challenges, specific opportunities, they have specific accomplishments that are good, they have deficits and failures that are bad, but this is the setup, this is the beginning that you must have in order to understand chapters 4 through 22. So, to say the church can kind of take a seat in the balcony and watch the unfolding of everything that transpires, basically in chapter 6, starting with the breaking seals, and we're sure glad I'm not down there, completely misses the point.

Everything in this book is for you and me right now. So, we then hear people say, oh, you dispensationalists, you're all about the rapture and escapism and fleeing the wrath to come, and God has not appointed us to wrath but to deliverance, and you want to see what's going to happen to everybody else because you're going to be safe in heaven as the time of Jacob's trouble unfolds on earth. Again, to the extent that people have done this, they too missed the point.

This isn't a book for excitable people to get their adrenaline pumping about wild end-time world events. Every verse of every chapter is for us to look at just as we have done with Old Testament books, whether it is Jeremiah or Ezekiel or Isaiah or the books of Moses or the books of history or the books of poetry or the books of wisdom in the Old Testament. Yes, they were full of content that applied to the immediate recipients in the same way that these letters actually made it to these churches and were read and heard by the living members of these churches back in the end of the first century, but they are stand-ins, they are representatives, they are in a sense a convenient way for God to deliver a timeless message to all of the people in this age by delivering it to them first.

This is what he did with Israel in the Old Testament. He had prophecies for specific tribes. He had messages to specific kings and individuals.

He had messages to specific generations who were either faithful or unfaithful, who were

entering the land in victory and conquest or leaving the land in defeat and captivity, but those people are a means for God to deliver messages that are timeless and that have pertinence and applicability. All these things were written for our instruction, Paul says, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. And that was just as true of people 1,600 years ago or 900 years ago or 400 years ago or 40 years ago or right now.

This is the beauty of the word of God. I will tell you the thing that I believe is missed more often than any other in modern biblical interpretation. Scholarship is the unconscious adopting of the scientific method.

We have a text, we will parse this text, and from it we will glean evidence, and when we cross-reference the evidence, this will tell us the truth. There is an enormous lack of attention paid to what constitutes God's power in the life of a believer. It's not the text.

And even if we understand Revelation completely and fully, we decode the symbolism, we parse out what it really means, we are still hopeless and helpless and useless. Why? Full understanding. Light-shed Revelation is just truly an open book.

It's just as though it was written in plain English, like the disciples said to the Lord Jesus when He explained some of the parables, now you are speaking plainly. Thank you. I finally grasp it.

That's great. Is that what it takes to live a life of service and function before God, to stand at the judgment approved unto God, a workman who does not need to be ashamed? What's the missing element? It is the active presence and power of God's Holy Spirit to lead and to guide. I will tell you something that is controversial, that raises eyebrows, that will create criticism and disagreement.

You do not have to have a perfect Bible. You don't have to have a completely uncorrupted text without scribal error, without omission, without duplication, without homoteluton, without intentional scribal changes such as are pointed out and decried by many, a textual author person in the modern day, as though, look at these variances. There are more variations in the 6,000 texts of the New Testament than there are words in the New Testament, because you have so many manuscripts that differ in so many ways, you can't possibly know what the original said, therefore, your faith is founded on beliefs and myths and basically ignorance.

You don't really know that nobody knows what your Bible really says. This completely omits the gift that God gave us through the Lord Jesus Christ of the Holy Spirit. What is the Holy Spirit's role? You know this from the Gospel of John.

What did Jesus say about him leaving so that he's not here to tell us at firsthand as eyewitnesses of his specific words? Who ensures that we arrive at the truth? When the Comforter comes, he will lead you into all truth. What if I've got a bad translation? What if I've got a corrupt text? What if I'm looking at the longer ending of the Gospel of Mark and people are playing with snakes and drinking poison? What if I get the pericope of the woman taken in

adultery and then somebody tells me that it's not original to the Gospel of John and depending on the manuscript it's found in four or five different places or not at all? Oh my goodness, if I don't have a pristine Bible, I can't know what is true. Again and again and again, people omit the person of the Holy Spirit and the reason that he has been gifted to us with his manifold ministries of sealing and filling and gifting, regenerating, convicting, leading and guiding us into the truth.

If there is something squirrely in the text, I don't have to be a textual scholar. I don't have to go buy books by the great textual critics and analyze manuscript families. What do I need to do? I get down on my knees.

I go to the Lord in prayer. I claim the promise of James chapter one. If any of you needs wisdom and lacks it, ask of God.

People act as though Christianity stands or falls based on a text or a right understanding of a text or whether a word is present or absent. Was Jesus disappointed or was he angry when he talked to this particular person? Is it Beelzebub or Beelzebul in this particular verse? And it is so critical. Our faith is not in a text.

Our faith is in God, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. When I need to know the truth of the word, I don't have to figure out which is the best Bible. I get a Bible out.

I study and I do so on a regular basis and I submit my understanding to my Father in heaven. I ask, I seek, I knock. Lord, this thing about snakes and poison, is this, you know, these signs will follow those who believe? And God the Holy Spirit will warn me away from faulty understandings or faulty applications.

If I misunderstand Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated, if I develop some sort of a suspicion that I should be anti-Semitic and anti-Jewish because the Jews crucified Christ, a better text is not going to prevent me from making those kinds of errors. The full-blown, full-orbed presence and power of God's Holy Spirit will keep me straight. If we had all lived a few hundred years back in the days of slavery in this country and had been fetched up on plantations where there were slaves, what would be our attitude? What would be our treatment? Would we misconstrue the curse of Ham or would we decide that God is punishing these people and they're not human because they're a different color or they originated in a pagan land? Would a really, really good Bible have prevented slave owners in the South from beating, abusing, impregnating slaves? They just needed a better Bible? What was the problem in Christian America that held and abused slaves? No Holy Spirit.

Where is the convicting coming from? What does the Holy Spirit do? He convicts of sin, of righteousness, of judgment. My appeal as we begin this study and we endeavor to relate symbols to reality, to understand the type of language that is being used in this apocalyptic vision, this unveiling, it's not supposed to be an obscuring. It isn't supposed to be inscrutable and non-understandable.

It is a revelation. And the truth will shine forth under the right conditions. One of the essential conditions is that we are susceptible and amenable to the witness, the ministry, the leading and guiding of God's Holy Spirit.

When you come to Revelation, when you're reading the text, when you're reviewing these lessons, thinking about the imagery and the symbolism and the representative nature of these churches and the representative nature of what is shown to John that he writes down for our benefit, you can get nowhere, nowhere. You will be wrong. You will be misled.

You will be misguided. You will be excitable. You will be blown about by every wind without the Holy Spirit.

That is the first, foremost requisite necessity for rightly dividing the Word of Truth is God's Spirit. We claim God's grace in making Him available to us, present with us, indwelling and filling us and leading us into all truth, bringing to our minds other scriptures so that we don't take one passage and run off in an extreme direction or misunderstand it to our own harm and the detriment of others around us. The guarantee is not the integrity of the text.

Any more than your ability to drive a car depends on having a perfectly clean and spotless windshield. You can have a terribly dirty windshield with cracks and divots. Trust me, I know.

A lot of rocks have hit across the years. A lot of mud has splashed. A lot of bugs have splattered themselves.

Yet amazingly, I can drive perfectly from point A to point B despite an imperfect view because there is enough visible that I know what is and isn't a hazard on the road and what is and isn't a part of my faulty windshield. In the same way, God the Holy Spirit will prevent us from being misled. How many times are we commanded let no one deceive you? Be not deceived.

Don't let your own heart deceive you. The path to truth is available to us. The Word of God shines a light on it, but we walk it by means of the Spirit.

Walk by means of the Spirit. So, anytime you come to any part of the Word of God, and it is no less true of revelation than any other, begin by going to the Lord God in heaven, acknowledging our known sins, ensuring that there is no obstacle to the fulfillment of God's promises because we are obedient, we are cleansed, we are coming into the throne room of God with our hearts having been sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. That is the key to understanding all biblical truth, all prophecy, all revelation.

The carnal mind only understands carnal things. What does the Bible say the carnal mind does not understand? The carnal mind does not understand the things of the Spirit because they are spiritually discerned. Every erroneous idea, every bogus take, every misguided application in the book of Revelation is sourced in somebody that wasn't listening to the Holy Spirit.

Sounds bold, sounds judgmental, but I base this on what the Word of God itself says. Jesus said,

when the Spirit comes, He will lead you into all truth. So if somebody doesn't have the truth, they are not being led by the Spirit of God, and that's a personal problem.

My problem is endeavoring to discern where there is valid revelation of the Word of God that the Holy Spirit will affirm, and I will find that it bears fruit in my life. It is one thing to speculate on whether the revived Roman Empire is going to come out of the European Union, whether Satan's throne is really somewhere in Turkey, is he, you know, Satan is living in a cave and comes out every once in a while to see who he may devour, or to say, are the scorpions with stings in their tail technological marvels we have by way of drones and unguided missiles and so on. That is immaterial to whether or not I will stand at the judgment approved by God, a workman that does not need to be ashamed.

How many times have you heard me say this from the Word of God? The judgment seat of Christ is not a theology test. You're not going to get a multiple choice on, well, what did these seven seals really mean? And what was the third of the earth? Was that literal or symbolical? And the woman with child and the flood and so on. That is not going to be at the evaluation.

What effect is this text going to have on you and on me going forward? That should occupy our minds far more than, I think I've got a better construction of what the symbolism parses out to in real life. What does it parse out to in my real life? Am I going to come under the condemnations that Jesus describes when he says, I have a few things against you. I have some commendations.

I have some criticisms. This is gold for us. Somebody else has stood there and received the evaluation of the Lord Jesus and I can be warned.

I can be chastised. I can be set on a better path. How much better to learn from the mistakes of others than to be hung for making the very same mistakes and I should have known better.

This book is so valuable to keep us on the narrow road heading for the straight gate to life. That's my introduction to the importance of this book and its purpose. The purpose of this book is to show us things that are to come for a reason.

When you know what's coming up, what do you do? You prepare. You get ready. If God the Father is showing us through the Lord Jesus, through the angel, through the apostle John, through the angels to the churches, if he is showing us things that are about to take place, it goes without saying that the idea is now that this has been revealed to me, I need to get ready.

I know what's coming. It's one thing to be blindsided, to be surprised, to be caught unawares. I had no idea.

It's something else to have been told explicitly and specifically this is what is coming up so that I can be prepared and be ready. I base this on what Jesus says in verse 3, blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy and those who keep those things which are written in it. The time is near.

There are three categories here. Do you see it in verse 3? And there is a blessing that you can claim, that I can claim. For purposes of our current discussion, I am the reader.

I am taking us to this book and I am taking us through it verse by verse, chapter by chapter. Blessed is he who reads because in the ancient day, most people could not read. There were scribes who did the reading.

There were those who had education and could stand up and communicate things that had been passed along in writing. So there is a blessing for the person who takes up this prophecy and communicates it to others with skills that the common group may not share. So the reader, the teacher, the communicator gets a blessing.

Blessed is he who reads and blessed are those who hear. Do you notice the change in number? He who reads is one guy with a copy of this book. He who reads.

Those who hear. This is a one-to-many pattern. Do you notice, do you remember that this comes up in the book? To the angel of the church in Ephesus write.

There is a single messenger who is then supposed to communicate that letter to the remainder of those in Ephesus. So there's a chain of custody that is single individuals. There's one God, the Father, who gives it to one God, the Son, who gives it to one angel, who gives it to one apostle, who gives it to one angel at each of these seven churches.

One messenger. And that messenger then disseminates this word to a group. Single chain of custody until it reaches the group.

And it has been so ever since the first century. Now, this is John the apostle. These are to be shown to his servants, things which must shortly take place.

People try to say, well, when it starts happening, it'll be immediate. It'll be really quick once it starts going, but there's no hint of how soon. Shortly means shortly.

We talked about this last time. It's tachus. Tachycardia means your heart is beating quickly.

Tachometer, how fast is your engine turning over? It means quickly. These things are going to take place quickly in the sense of shortly, soon. How can that be when this was put down nearly 2,000 years ago? We've talked about this.

All of these events you will witness because you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and you are going to see and participate in what is revealed in this book. And we are accountable for the knowledge to be ready when it happens, to understand it, to know its sequence and its purpose, to not panic, to not fall apart, to not go into shock when there is destruction and death, suffering, bloodshed. I thought we served the gentle Jesus.

I was expecting a field of daisies and children seated on his knee and a babbling brook. And what is this? This is horrific. This is horrifying.

We are read into the picture. We are told ahead of time there is going to be cataclysm. There is going to be tribulations such as the world has never seen.

Worse than Noah's flood. And you will be alive and aware and around when all of these things take place. Will we know what is going on? If our name is called for participation, will we know? I recently re-watched a wonderful movie series based on the books by C.S. Forrester about Horatio Hornblower.

And I remember as a youth when I read those books I was impressed as Forrester drew this character of Horatio Hornblower. Even as a midshipman and as a junior lieutenant he kept himself aware and abreast of current events. He knew where the French troops were located.

He knew what the objective would be of their ships that were in a harbor and would need to sail up a coast and provide supplies or protection. He had a strategic understanding of the war even though he was not an admiral. He was not a commodore.

He was not a senior captain. But his success was based on his awareness and his readiness to act on what he knew to be true. He's a fictional character but it was a wonderful picture in my mind of the opportunities we have as believers.

We are not in government, most of us. We are not in positions of leverage when it comes to the economy or to the great movements of large things. But you look at the Word of God and there can be a man threshing wheat indoors to whom the angel appears and says, Gideon, thou mighty man of valor, I've got a job for you.

You have Manoah and his wife, nondescript couple, who are going to be the parents of one of the great judges in the Old Testament. You have any number of examples, Hannah, Elizabeth and Zachariah, Mary and Joseph, who would blend into any crowd shot, nondescript, unknown, unremarkable, but because of what they believed, because of the strength of their faith, here's Simeon, here's Anna at the temple when the baby is going to be dedicated, and because of what they know, they are ready when a giant movement of God in his plan and purpose for human history unfolds. They know what's going on.

My eyes have seen the salvation of Israel, Simeon says. I can now go to my grave. I waited for it.

I watched for it. God assured me of it. And here it is.

His testimony is preserved in Scripture for all time, for all eternity. One little old man, 2,000 years ago, figured it out, believed it, and has become an integral part of God's self-revelation, his purpose, his inspired word. That should be us.

We don't know what role God may have, but we have this revelation given to us, and if we strive to be servants, we will be ready. Look at verse 9. I, John, your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos. Why? Why has John been identified as an enemy of the state, arrested by the Romans, and

exiled to this island 24 miles off the coast of Turkey to work in salt mines, to be isolated, to be prevented from communicating with anybody? Why? Why is John viewed as such a threat that he is exiled 24 miles off the coast? What for? For the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

He hasn't written this book yet. How can he be exiled for the word of God and testimony of Christ that's in the book of Revelation when he hasn't written it yet? What word of God and what testimony of Jesus Christ is John such a threat over that he's exiled? Go back to verse 2. John bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ. How do I know this is the apostle John that wrote this letter? Keep your finger here and turn back to John chapter 1. You know it, but turn back to it anyway.

John chapter 1. Gospel of John 1.1. In the beginning was what? The word of God. You remember in John chapter 19? Sorry, John chapter 20 verse 30. Got to watch those corners in your Bible.

John 20 verse 30. Truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book. Written in this book.

These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name. I would submit to you when Jesus says to John, write the things which you have seen. That's basically the gospel of John.

These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ. He continues that idea when he writes his epistles. Do you remember the introduction to 1st John? That which was from the beginning which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled concerning the word of life, capital W. Verse 3, 1st John 1. That which we have seen and heard, we declare to you that you also may have fellowship with us.

John is the faithful witness. When God tells him to write, he writes. That's the beauty of the gospel of John, the epistles of John, and the revelation of Jesus Christ set down in writing by John.

What a privilege we have to have this threefold witness. The things which were gospel of John, the things which are 1st John, 2nd John, 3rd John, 1st chapter of the revelation, 2nd chapter of the revelation, 3rd chapter of the revelation, and the things which are to come, chapter 4 and following. It isn't just the book of Revelation that fulfills Jesus' command.

Everything that John wrote is for our benefit as servants of God. What an opportunity we have. We'll come back and pick up here at verse 4 when we come back from the break.