

**“Community of the Blessed”** | *Revelation 1:1-7*

Ecclesia

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When you hear the word “Revelation” - what pops into your mind?

End Times

Prophecy

predicting the future

final judgment

impending doom

book of the Bible

eye-opening experience or understanding

vision (aha moment); something revealed

Today, we are going to start a series on the first chapters of the book of Revelation.

I know, some of you are excited about that

A couple of you have told me that you want me to be a little fired up

Maybe you wanna hear fire and doom

hellfire and brimstone

sermons about beasts with multiple heads and horns

bowls of wrath

and all that.

I hate to disappoint you, but that is not where we are going.

We are going to focus on the first three chapters of Revelation.

The introduction and the letters to the seven churches of Asia

Here, we have letters from Jesus to seven churches of the First Century

As we see them and the issues that they were going through,

I have a strong feeling that were are going to see ourselves and our circumstances  
echoed there

I have a strong feeling that we will hear Jesus’ words

speaking to Ecclesia and to our circumstances as well.

So, with that said, I think we need to clear up a couple of things as we begin

So let’s start with a few definitions:

Revelation: something that has been revealed; “unveiling”

What does your Bible say is the name of this book?

The Revelation to John

The Revelation of St. John the Apostle

First words = title “The revelation of Jesus Christ”

double meaning - Jesus is the one revealing

Jesus is the one being revealed

Chain of transmission: God - Jesus - angel - John - church

Prophecy: What comes to mind when you hear “prophecy” ?  
we often think of prediction of the future  
(sometimes prophecy contains this, but this is not the meaning)

Think back to the prophets of the Hebrew Bible  
We often hear this phrase: “The word of the Lord came to \_\_\_\_\_.”  
The prophet spoke the word of God to the people.

Most often, this word from God came to help them make sense of their current  
circumstances  
Israel is captivity in Babylon, God sends a prophet  
They are invaded by the Assyrians, God sends a prophet  
The monarchy is not following God’s ways, God sends a prophet

In the same way, Revelation is a letter of prophecy  
written to the seven churches in Asia  
to help them make sense of their current situation and circumstances (map)

I think that it will help us to think about Revelation as a letter  
rather than a book.  
A book is written for an anonymous audience - open to whomever  
A letter is written to a specific person or group of people in a specific place and  
specific time and specific circumstance

John closes out these beginning verses with a blessing:  
*Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy,  
and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.*

He is speaking that blessing on those of the seven churches,  
that they would receive the word of God  
but not just hear it - do it (keep what is written there)

When the Bible talks about hearing God’s word,  
it is assumed that if you truly hear it, you will do something about it.

Therefore, that blessing extends from the churches of Asia  
to us, gathered together - reading, hearing, and doing God’s words.  
I hope that you recognize here the community of the blessed.

Verse 4 begins the letter:  
*4 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, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the  
kings of the earth.*

Let’s break that down just a little bit.  
John greets the churches from the one who was, who is, who is to come  
We’ve heard this before:

In Exodus 3, Moses says to the burning bush  
“What is your name? Who shall I say sent me?”  
“Tell them I Am sent you.”  
The one who was, who is, who is to come.

John also greets them from the Spirit of the seven churches.  
We’re going to see that the number seven has an important meaning in scripture  
it is a sign and symbol of completion  
for example: seven days of creation

John addresses the seven churches in Asia  
there were more than 7  
it is a sign of completion -  
in other words, all of them

By saying the Spirit of the Seven churches,  
John is greeting them from the spirit of the church  
John may very well mean here the Holy Spirit

Finally, John greets them from Jesus Christ  
This is one of only three times John uses the term Christ  
Greek word for Messiah  
the promised one  
the savior  
the deliverer

“the faithful witness”  
Greek word here is the same root word for martyr  
a martyr was someone who gave witness to their faith even to the point of death  
Isn’t this the witness of Christ?  
the one who gave witness to God’s love - even to the point of death

Jesus is the giver of John revelation,  
therefore John is establishing him here as the one who is worthy to give witness

“the firstborn of the dead”  
Jesus may have given his life, but that was not the end of the story  
Three days after his death, Jesus was given new life  
in the power and glory of the Resurrection.

The Good News of the Resurrection is that it’s not just for Jesus.  
No, he was the first fruit of a whole harvest of new life  
the first fruit of a resurrection harvest  
the firstborn of a new generation  
a new species

As the Apostle Paul put it:  
Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed  
away; behold, the new has come.

“and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”

This was a title originally given to Caesar.

It's not the end of the story that Jesus overcame death.

Because of his death and resurrection,

he has been established as the true and rightful king

Jesus came not just for spiritual purposes

Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and exaltation were political challenges

Jesus will not share power with any other because he alone is the rightful king

Jesus will not share allegiance, for he is the one worthy to sit on the throne

the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Isn't this what we say when we proclaim together-

Christ has died

Christ is risen

Christ will come again

John is saying:

greetings, grace, and peace to you

in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

in the name of the Creator, Redeemer, and Comforter

And then John does exactly what we should all do when confronted with the powerful reality that is our Trinitarian God:

He breaks out into praise.

This is the first of many hymns that we find in the book of Revelation

(this is the one I was compelled to put to music 12 years ago that we sang this morning)

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

“To him who loves us”

How do we know who God is?

God is love (according to 1 John)

What is the greatest commandment?

Love God with everything you are and love your neighbor as yourself.

We love God because God loved us first.

Help me out here: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

This is the Gospel message.

This is what I'm trying to get you all to see.

This is what I remind you every week before you leave this place

“Remember that you are loved (and there's nothing you can do about it).”

“and freed us from our sins by his blood”

We don't like to admit that we are powerless  
We don't like to admit that we have no control over ourselves.  
We don't like to admit that we are slaves to anything

but that's the truth - we were slaves to sin  
we were in bondage to the power of sin in our lives

But remember Jesus' first sermon in Luke

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

(Luke 4:18-19 ESV)

Jesus' life and death has brought us freedom  
He has come to proclaim liberty

Many of us know what it's like to be in bondage  
addictions / habits  
substances      gambling  
food              approval  
shopping        sex

Many of us know what it's like to want to quit  
to want to change, but finding that we just can't.

If you haven't experienced that yourself,  
no doubt you know someone who has.  
Through his blood, he has set us free.

But he's not set us free to run and frolic in the woods in our freedom.  
We're not set free to be heavenly flower children.

“and made us a kingdom of priests”

We have been made into a community  
a kingdom - with a king (Jesus)  
we are brought into relationship with one another

to model a new way of life  
a new way of being in this world  
A way that runs counter to the way of the world  
A way that goes upstream against the flow of sin  
A way that is modeled after the love of God

and he's placed us in this kingdom to be priests.

Think for a minute - what does a priest do?

short answer - stand in the gap

to stand between to glory of heaven  
and the fallenness of earth

between the perfection of God  
and the sinfulness of humanity

not as innocent people  
but as those forgiven by blood of Christ  
as priests - to bring the message of God, the message of hope,  
the message of Jesus

Think back to our chain of transmission

God - Jesus - angel - John - church - **world**

I'm going to put my cards on the table when it comes to Revelation

I am convinced that Revelation is a lot less about the HOW of the End Times  
and a whole lot more about the WHO

In the midst of the struggle and difficulty of the Asian churches,  
John is reminding them that God is still in control

In the midst of our struggle and difficulty,  
John wants to remind us that God is still in control

“to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

My prayer is that we will truly be a Community of the Blessed  
a community that hears these words  
and lives into them

These words that remind us of the great God we serve  
who was, and is, and is to come  
who is the Spirit at work in the Church  
who is the Messiah

who has loved us, forgiven us, set us free, and made us into a kingdom called to stand in the  
gap for our world  
our family  
neighbors  
friends  
coworkers

To share the message that, despite the headlines,  
God is in control - and there is hope.

Are you willing to open your mouth? Are you willing to speak up?

Are you willing to live your life in the gap for the world?