

Study One – Revelation 1:1-8

- 1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,**

Revelation and insight into the things of God are gifts. There is no reason for pride or arrogance, for God gives insight to whomever He chooses. Anything I see, God has opened my eyes to see. I cannot criticize anyone who doesn't see it, because there is a chance that God hasn't opened their eyes to see it.

Let's consider some Biblical examples of God opening someone's eyes to see something:

1. Hagar (Genesis 16:7-16)
2. Abraham (Genesis 22)
3. Balaam (Numbers 22:21-31)
4. Gehazi, Elisha's servant (2 Kings 6:15-17)
5. The disciples on the Emmaus road (Luke 24:31)
6. The scales that fell from Saul's eyes (Acts 9:18)

A good prayer to pray for self or others:

Ephesians 1:17 - I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

This is the revelation "of" Jesus Christ. There can be two ways to understand this. First, it is a revelation that talks about and shows John and the church more of who Jesus is. Second, the revelation belongs to Jesus. He gives it to whom He wills. Jesus is the source and focus of all revelation.

Much of modern study of Revelation focuses on the end times. But the purpose for the book as expressed in this first verse, is to reveal what will happen "soon." Is this reference to "soon" figurative for what will happen over the next 2,000 years? Or does "soon" mean "soon," such as right away?

You cannot understand the book of Revelation, which is a dream, unless you take into account what it meant to the churches to which it was addressed. Therefore, the focus of this study will **not** be the end times, but will focus on the possible meaning to the early church and its application to your life today.

God the Father gave this revelation to Jesus, who entrusted it to an angel to give to John who in turn wrote it to the church. Revelation is always given to someone and it must be passed on faithfully. God gives you something often not only because you need it, but because someone you will come in contact with needs it as well.

ASSIGNMENT: If John wrote his revelation down, shouldn't you be writing yours? Why not start a journal this week? This doesn't have to be a long, daily activity that takes a lot of time. Just begin to record basic phrases, thoughts, or Bible verses that impress you on any particular day. If you feel inclined, you can write more in sort of a diary format. But at least keep some basic record of the "revelation" or insight that the Lord gives you.

The word for servant in this verse is *doulos*, which means slave. A slave has one right and that is to know the will of the master. You and I are God's servants; He is not to serve us, we are to serve Him.

I have visited the isle of Patmos on two separate occasions. It is a remote, small island. The island is dominated by one big mountain and you climb or ride up the winding road to tour an Orthodox chapel at the top that is more than 1,000 years old! Then you go down to the famous cave.

Tradition has it that the revelation came to John while he was in a cave and he dictated it to an assistant.

Tradition also has it that the apostle John received the revelation. That is subject to dispute, but for the purpose of this study, we will assume that the John the beloved apostle received and recorded the revelation.

2 who testifies to everything he saw-- that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

John "saw" the word of God. The word of God gives vision and opens the eyes of your heart to the things of God.

John also "saw" the testimony of Jesus. Even though the angel delivered the message, it was a faithful and true account of Jesus' words. Angels are true messengers. We are to be true messengers as well. The angel isn't the focus; Jesus is the focus.

Jesus was also a faithful witness, for He testified faithfully to everything the Father wanted Him to report. He expects His followers to do the same.

3 Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

There is a blessing given to anyone who reads the book of Revelation. I don't think that promise is attached to any other book in the Bible; it may be implied, but it isn't written.

There is further blessing to *hear* it and *take it to heart*. Once again the reader is told that the time is near. To repeat, we must determine what this book meant to the church of its day in order to comprehend the real meaning of the revelation.

It isn't enough to hear the word, we must comprehend and take it to heart. Are you a hearer of the Word, or a hearer and doer? (see James 1:17).

<p><i>ASSIGNMENT: Since there is a blessing attached to the reading of Revelation, why not take time this week to read the entire book?</i></p>
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4 John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne,

I have heard it taught that seven is a number of perfection and completion. Therefore, the seven churches could represent the entire church and the seven spirits the fullness of God's Spirit. Remember, the role of the Spirit is to lead the Church into the truth and convict the world of sin. The Spirit in all His power and authority is behind this revelation.

John wishes the churches "grace and peace." Revelation has been a source of tremendous legalism and anxiety instead of grace and peace. Therefore, any interpretation of this book that doesn't produce grace and peace in the lives of the hearers probably isn't the correct interpretation.

Isn't it good news that God doesn't change? He is, was and is to come. We never have to worry what mood God is in, or be concerned that His standards or requirements will change!

Why were these seven churches singled out for this revelation? Perhaps John had a relationship with them from ministering there. Maybe their problems and strengths were representative of the problems of the church in that era.

5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,

The Father and Spirit were mentioned in the previous verse, now there is a mention of Jesus; there is reference to all three persons in the first five verses.

We see three of Jesus' characteristics in this verse:

1. A faithful witness
2. The firstborn from the dead
3. The ruler of the kings of the earth

A faithful witness tells only the truth from a perspective that is free from deceit, delusion or exaggeration.

If Jesus is the firstborn from the dead, then there are or will be others born from the dead after Him. Thus the resurrection is an important part of Jesus' identity today. The church I was raised in seemed to focus more on the crucified Jesus rather than the resurrected Jesus.

There are kings on the earth; they are part of God's plan for government. But every king has a King over him, and that King is Jesus.

Jesus has titles and authority, but He also loves us and freed us from our sins through His death. Jesus is not aloof, sitting in heaven enjoying His power and prestige. He touched and changed my life, and yours too! That is why Revelation is a book of worship, because of not only who Jesus is, but also because of what He has done for His people.

6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father-- to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

Not only did Jesus do personal things for us, but He also made us into a people united under His leadership. We are a kingdom; that implies that we have a King. We are citizens together of a heavenly Kingdom.

Think of what this meant to the early church. They were well acquainted with Rome's kingdom, so they could understand a kingdom culture. But their allegiance was to a higher Kingdom and King, even though the Roman kingdom was demanding greater loyalty.

But Jesus had told us that the kingdom of God was within us or in our midst. It was not like other earthly kingdoms (see Luke 17:21).

We are also priests, equipped and qualified to handle the things of God. Lest we be exalted over this magnificent stature, we are a kingdom and priests to serve God, not to dominate men.

The realization of all this leads us to worship!

7 Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.

What Jesus does only among His people at this time will be done in the future for all the world to see. His appearance will be a source of mourning when people realize what humanity has done to Jesus. They will also mourn when they realize that any religious system that did not honor Him as God was the wrong system. I think at that point people will mourn over wasted lives that pursued empty gods.

It is a historic fact that Jesus came, was murdered, buried and raised from the dead. The hope of the Church is His return. Come quickly, Lord Jesus!

All history will conclude with His return, whether nations or individuals realize this or not. We should not be lulled to a state of lethargy due to His delay. Are you ready for His return?

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

The alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. For anything to make sense, you need all the letters to compose words and sentences. Jesus is everything. He is all the letters and He arranges the letters to compose the messages He chooses.

He is also eternal. He was, is and is to come.

He is Almighty. He has all might and power.

What a powerful sentence this is. The Lord God is everything for all time and beyond time. His proclamations are good for all time and He backs them up with His never-changing nature. Thus, His authority and power are established so that we can receive the rest of the revelation with full confidence and pay attention to it with all diligence.

We are now ready to receive the word of God from the Almighty!