

EFC Preaching
January 21, 2024
"Revelation: Humility and Expectation"

Good morning, English Fellowship Church. My name is Jeremy, and I'm one of the Pastors here. This morning we begin a new series in the book of Revelation.

Pray.

I know that for some of us, simply mentioning Revelation causes a significant reaction. For some, Revelation is your favorite book, and you are excited to dig in! For others, there is hesitation and you hope this goes well. In fact, in my observation, many people avoid Revelation out of concern that it is too confusing and will cause disagreements. I have to admit, I am guilty of avoiding it in the past because of similar concerns.

But the truth is, if we avoid Revelation, we do so to our own loss. I think of it like going to the dentist. Avoiding Revelation is like the man who avoided going to the dentist, and all his teeth fell out! If we avoid Revelation, it is to our own loss!

The truth is, we don't need to fear Revelation. God is the perfect communicator, and He knows how to tell us exactly what He wants us to know through His Word. In fact, we know God expects us to be able to understand Revelation, because He expects us to obey and apply it to our lives - and we can't apply something we don't understand!

Revelation begins like this:

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near. 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 1:1-5a, ESV)

There is a lot of background information here that will help us understand this book, but before we look at it, I want you to hear clearly: There is blessing for us if we read, hear, and keep what God tells us here! This doesn't mean understanding will always come easily - we will need to ask God to help us understand rightly. He is able and willing to help us understand His message, and apply it to our lives!

If we avoid Revelation it is to our loss, because God gives us many wonderful things here:

- The revelation of Jesus, who is the slain Lamb, and our sovereign King

- Powerful pictures of who God is, so we can know and worship Him as we draw near in Christ
- Perspective on our lives, this world, and eternity
- Hope and encouragement as we follow God
- Warning and fear for any who reject God
- Power for perseverance and growth in holiness, no matter the enemies we face
- And so much more!

Truly, if we avoid Revelation, it is to our own loss.

My approach:

- Only I will be the preacher through this series, in order to more easily give continuity. Others will preach periodically, but on different topics or passages outside Revelation.
- That said, I do not claim to have everything figured out; I will be learning and growing with you through this.
- I will work hard to keep the big picture always in view, and it is not my intention to over-analyze every detail. That said, we want to dig deep, so I'm looking for balance.
 - By big picture, I mean keeping in mind things like: the centrality of Jesus Christ: our goal is to see and know Him clearly, to worship God more fully, to walk faithfully as we grow in confidence that Jesus is reigning King over all
- This book was written in history to a specific audience, so just as it was applicable to their lives, we will find the same truths applicable to our lives.
- Apocalypse: That said, Revelation does have a bent toward the End Times that runs throughout it. So I'll work hard to keep our eyes on the end goal, even as we consider what it means for our lives today.
- Revelation is biblical prophecy, which means several things:
 - It is a direct message from God
 - It has fulfillment in real history, while at the same time having a spiritual message
 - Often there is a dual (or multi) fulfillment
- Revelation uses a lot of symbolism. This symbolism is often rooted in the Old Testament, while being applied to a new situation by John. So we'll be looking to the OT to help us understand.
 - However, I think God chose to communicate through symbols to keep us from focusing too much on their concrete fulfillment in history; instead, while I believe God wants us to be aware of potential fulfillment in history, I think He desires us to focus even more on the truths these symbols point us to; in the end, I believe God desires us to come to know and worship God and Jesus more fully, and to walk faithfully with Him no matter the pressures we face in life, whether they are the literal "End Times" or not yet.
 - Symbols also are intended to touch our hearts, not merely our heads.

I want to take a few minutes to draw your attention to the setting of this book. Understanding these things will be a great help for us to understand this book rightly.

Author

- God
 - God alone, holy, holy, holy, Trinity, Creator and Sustainer of all
 - Loving and just, merciful and to be feared
 - Eternally true in all He is, says and does
 - His word endures forever! His message to us is sure, worthy of our full acceptance, belief, and response, and hope/certainty
 - He knows how to communicate, and has communicated exactly how and what He desired, for His glory and our joy.
- Given to Jesus Christ
 - This book is the unveiling of Jesus; any description of Him we observe or read should grab our attention
 - Jesus – man
 - Christ – anointed one / chosen one / Messiah / title signifying He is the One sent from God to be Deliverer and King
 - The Lamb that was slain
 - He is God in the flesh, our Messiah and King over all the earth
- Made known by an angel
 - Messenger – shows up throughout the book
- Written by the Apostle John
 - Lived with Jesus 3 years as one of His Disciples
 - Commissioned by Jesus to be His Apostle - messenger of Jesus' teachings and Gospel
 - Filled with Holy Spirit at Pentecost
 - Pastored early churches
 - Persecuted for his witness and faithfulness to Christ
 - Banished to the Island of Patmos when his persecutors failed to kill him

Original Audience

- The seven churches
 - These were real gatherings of real Christians, living in a real world in Asia Minor
 - Most likely living during the time of Emperor Domitian (AD 81-96), though it is possible it was written during the time of Emperor Nero (AD 54-68)
 - Clear that they were facing pressure to compromise their commitment to Christ
 - Emperor worship especially strong in Asia in order to receive favor - social pressure to do so, because the people didn't want to lose that favor
 - Jewish pressure to return to Jewish teachings - possible loss of legal status
 - Pressure of false teaching from within
 - Some had already been martyred for their faith, though it was likely not yet a broad occurrence
- The universal church
 - Numbers are significant in Revelation, and 7 signifies perfection or completeness
 - Not written to each church in Asia, and even some of the more prominent ones missing

- Message is for all of God's people between Pentecost and Jesus' second coming (preview of that message: God reigns sovereignly over all history, and Jesus has already won the battle; so persevere with courage as you obey Jesus and honor Him to the end. Sovereign God, Victorious Lamb, Persevering Saints)

Genre

- Epistle - historic
- Prophecy - God's message, with real fulfillment(s) but spiritual focus
- Apocalypse - End Time bent

I want to go back to the beginning of our time together. Revelation is God's message to us, and we avoid it to our loss. God has communicated to us clearly and powerfully, for our great encouragement and growth.

So how are we to approach this book? What should be our heart attitude when we think about this series in Revelation? Three words stand out in my mind: Humility, Expectation, and Worship.

Humility:

- Regarding God. These are His words, and He is Lord and God over all. It is His to speak, and ours to receive - and accept.
- Regarding ourselves. Likely, we will all learn from this - and be corrected. Yes, let us come to humbly held conviction and understanding to the extent we are able, but to do so rightly we need to allow God to correct us, and we need to always remain humble regarding the extent of our knowledge.
- Regarding one another. We will not all likely agree with every detail of interpretation. If we are united in the essentials, it is enough. And wherever there is disagreement, let us treat one another with love, grace, patience, honesty, and hope in God.

Expectation:

- Let us come with great expectation to hear from God, and be captured and transformed by Him - through His Word.
- 2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
- Isaiah 55:10-12 "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
- Romans 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the

righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith,[e] as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

Worship:

- We will learn many things along the way; we will see great visions of God Almighty, and the Lamb who was slain; we will wrestle with symbols and see great vistas of history. The point of this is not simply that we would know, as if we were studying for a math test. The point of it all is that we would worship God who is, and who was, and who is to come - and the Lamb who was slain to take away the sins of the world. Let all that we learn, all that we see, all that we come to know, move us to worship with full and glad hearts!

Revelation 5:6-14

And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying,

"Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth."

Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice,

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and blessing!"

And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"

And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.