

John and his ministry

Part 4

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[00:00:01] The last surviving Apostle of the Lord Jesus put him in exile there. He's challenged. The Lord Jesus shows, or God shows us in this book, how Rome and the power of Rome is going to come to an end and the earth is going to be judged and so on. Terms are used, you know, the great harlot sitting on seven mountains. Rome was built on seven hills and there are many terms used that allude to Rome at that time. If this book had been written without using symbolism, had just given its message in plain everyday Greek of the day, it would have been a very counter, a very revolutionary book and, you know, it would have been a very dangerous book for a Christian to have. But God, in his wisdom, gave it in signs and he was not giving this as a sensational expose to [00:01:08] be a bestseller in the Roman Empire. No, this was to show to his bondmen what must shortly take place. Now the prophet Amos tells us, the Lord says there, you know, will the Lord do anything except that he reveals it to his servants, the prophets. The Lord doesn't do things just unexpectedly and without warning. If they affect the Lord's people, if they affect whether it's Israel of old or the assembly today or whatever may be in the future, the Lord gives warning first and, you know, bring it to bear on your life. Everyone that has this hope in him purifies himself even as he is pure. And so the Lord is going to speak to his bondmen, going to tell them what is ahead. He's not writing this as a bestseller in the Roman Empire. And Brother Raymond Campbell, I don't know if Jack and [00:02:10] you were there, but remember when we had the meetings in the Woodman's Hall at Stony Point, two weeks of meetings on the chart from eternity to eternity. The first public meetings with an outside speaker in this county in connection with what is now the assembly here. After that, a local brother, not too long saved at the time, came to Brother Campbell and he said, you know, I hope in about three or four months you can come back and give us a series a few weeks on Revelation. I'd like to understand something of that book. And Brother Campbell, I was standing there listening, he said, no, I won't do that. He said, you're not ready for that yet. In order to understand the Revelation, you have to have some understanding of the 65 books that go before it, [00:03:06] because the Revelation ties together loose ends. The Revelation uses symbols that are introduced to us in Ezekiel, in Daniel, in various prophetic books, and it draws together the loose ends from all over the scripture, if I can use that term. I'm expanding a little bit on what Brother Campbell said. He said, you're not ready. You have to know the other 65 books first, to some degree, and I'm not coming for these meetings in a few months, that you wish. And, you know, I've appreciated that. I've often thought of that. The Revelation is an intensely interesting book, but the background is in the rest of scripture, and we don't want to forget that. If a symbol is used in Revelation that is not used elsewhere in scripture, it is explained on the spot in [00:04:01] Revelation. And we, one example of that, the verse 20 of this chapter, the mystery of the seven stars, which thou hast seen on my right hand, and the seven golden lamps. The seven stars are angels of the seven assemblies, and the seven lamps are seven assemblies. We have no assemblies in the Old Testament prophecy. The church was something that was revealed in

New Testament times, really through the Apostle Paul, so we can't expect to find the church in the Old Testament. And if a symbol is going to be used to represent assemblies, the Lord has to explain it here in the Revelation. And the stars, the angels, messengers, angel and messengers, the same word I understand. You know, this is something new here in the New Testament. And you'll find with the symbolism, if you don't have an explanation for the symbolism in Revelation, you've got to dig, because it'll be back farther [00:05:02] somewhere else. And this book brings God's Word to its victorious conclusion. It's part of the Word of God. This bondman John testified the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, all things that he saw. Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things written in it, for the time is near. Notice how that is emphasized. Things that must shortly take place, the time is near. You know, this is a tremendous encouragement, to know these things. And there's a special blessing attached to reading this book, to hearing the words of the prophecy. You know, there were many people in those days, as there are today, who are unable to read. Are [00:06:05] they going to be deprived of blessing? No, they can hear the words of the prophecy, and then keep the things written in it. All right, John begins. John to the seven assemblies, which 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, which are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, firstborn from the dead, the prince of the kings of the earth. All right, here's who it's addressed to, the seven assemblies.

Who it's from, this was the way letters were written in those days. You started out, not dear John, but you know, you started in this way. Who was writing, instead of the signature at the end, that was right at the beginning. Who was writing, who was being addressed, and then what you had [00:07:03] to say. But notice, the Lord Jesus is presented in different guise from the very beginning, and even God. God is presented as he who is, and who was, and who is to come. It's nothing new for us, but it's not the way God is ordinarily presented, and after all the scriptures that we've had on God being our Father, you know, the Lord doesn't have John write this. From God the grace and peace be unto you, from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ. That's the language the Apostle Paul can use. Now, here it's God is, you know, in the majesty of his person, the existing one, the one who always has been, the one who always will be, and then the seven spirits. There you go back to Isaiah 11, the first verses, the sevenfold witness, really, or the sevenfold personality. I don't know how to [00:08:02] best express it, but we have the spirit mentioned in a sevenfold character there, and I think this is what we have here. We find at various times the seven spirits, the fullness of the Spirit of God. It's not that there are seven Holy Spirits, or a gradation of spirits, no. But the Holy Spirit in his fullness, and Jesus Christ is referred to here as the faithful witness. John had to suffer for his witness' sake. There had been those who had been unfaithful, there were those who were faithful, but the Lord Jesus is preeminently the faithful witness. The firstborn from the dead, art has brought that before us. Firstfruits of them that have fallen asleep, firstborn from the dead here, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Incidentally, that last title was a title [00:09:02] that the Roman Emperor took for himself. If you know little of the history of Rome, they had, hundreds of years before, they had tossed out a succession of Etruscan kings, and they had set up a republic. Julius Caesar was assassinated because some of his closest friends felt that he was wanting the title of king, and the title of king was repulsive to the Romans because of the history they'd had with kings. Julius Caesar's nephew, Octavian, Augustus Caesar, as he's called in scripture, when he became the top ruler, he would not take the title king. He was politically too savvy for that, but he allowed himself to be called princeps, p-r-i-n-c-e-p-s, a Latin word really derived from the root first head, and that's the word from which our word prince, in [00:10:08] English, is taken. The prince of the kings of the earth, the first head of all the

kings of the earth. And remember, there can be a Herod, and an Agrippa, and a this, and a that, and so on. They're all kings over some little petty area, maybe as big as a county here, and the emperor is over them all, but he doesn't call himself a king. He's the prince of the kings of the earth. And here, that title at the beginning of the book is given to the Lord Jesus. That puts him in direct conflict with, you know, a human emperor. Who is king of kings and lord of lords eventually? It's the Lord Jesus Christ. And from the start, his dignity and his supremacy over all human kings is asserted. And, you know, it's beautiful to see how John is writing this letter that the Lord wants him to write, [00:11:06] and he'll write on subjects that he's got to present. But when he speaks of the Lord Jesus, Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth, you know, his heart just overflows. It's hard to speak of a chapter like this without overflowing. And he says, to him who loves us. That's in the present. Yes, he loved us in the past, but he still loves us. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. To him who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in his blood, and made us a kingdom, priest to his God and Father. To him be the glory and the might to the ages of ages. Amen. And, you know, if we read the Revelation, and we [00:12:05] see this as the revelation of Jesus Christ in his dignity, in his majesty, in his power, this end of things that only comes out occasionally, for a moment, in the Gospels, you know, on the mountain of transfiguration, there in the garden, as we referred to before, and so on. Here in the Revelation, it's going to be presented full-blown. When we see the Lord Jesus in this way, what do we do? The first thing is worship, isn't it? And John can't write about this without just letting his heart overflow in worship to the Lord Jesus. And this one, who is Prince of the Kings of the Earth, is the one who loves us, the one who has washed us from our sins in his own blood. You know, this is [00:13:03] most precious. Prince of the Kings of the Earth loves us. An exile on an island can write with overflowing heart. And he says, behold, he comes with the clouds. Behold, he comes with the clouds.

This is not the rapture. This is the appearing. This is the second coming. Very literally, he comes with clouds. Every eye shall see him, and they which have pierced him, and all the tribes of the land shall wail because of him. Yea, amen. Wonderful, isn't it? This one, whose servants were persecuted, put on lonely islands, put to death, whatever, he's coming. He's coming with clouds. He's coming as the final victor. Every eye will see him, yes, and they which pierced him, the Roman [00:14:06] soldiers, the Gentiles, and all the tribes of the land shall wail because of him. And Israel is really responsible for his being pierced. We have this in Zechariah. I mean, the revelation ties in with so many other scriptures, and it's such a beautiful picture we have of the Lord. Well, John, the Lord says, I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, he who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. Then John gives his own history in writing this book, and we stop in the middle of that. He says, I turned back to see, verse 12, the voice which spoke with me, and having turned, I saw seven golden lamps, and in the midst of the seven lamps, one like the Son of Man, clothed with a [00:15:02] garment reaching to the feet. Now, John sees the Lord Jesus here in a way that he's never seen him before. Clothed with a garment reaching to the feet, gird about the breasts with a golden girdle, his head and hair white like white wool as snow, and his eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet like fine brass as burning in a furnace, and his voice as the voice of many waters, and having in his right hand seven stars, and out of his mouth a sharp two-edged sword going forth in his countenance as the sun shines in his power. You know, when we read the description of the Lord Jesus given us in the Song of Solomon, and read this description, it's quite a contrast. White and ruddy, hair black as a raven, here it's white as snow. The same person is being described, but you know, up until 150 or 200 years ago, the judges and the important men in our country were still powdering their [00:16:06] wigs, you know, when they were to sit on the bench. No, they were to have white hair regardless of what their age was, and what their experience was. You know, they were to sit there in dignity, and I believe the English judges still wear the powdered wigs. You know, they're not there as John Doe, who's been

elected to the judgeship. They're there as the one who represents the authority of the state, and you know, man has to put on some dignity. The Lord is seen here in his judicial majesty, and this one who's walked all these years with the Lord, who loves him so much, who's appreciated being the disciple whom Jesus loved, when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. It was that much of a shock for John to turn around. He recognized him, yes, he recognized who he was, [00:17:04] but he had never seen him in this way. I fell at his feet as dead. You know, there are things that are just overwhelming for us, and he laid his right hand upon me, saying, fear not, I'm the first and the last and the living one, and I became dead, and behold, I am living to the ages of ages, and have the keys of death and of Hades. Right therefore, and here in this 19th verse, we come to the outline of the book, the basic outline of the book. Right therefore, what thou hast seen, point one, the things that are, point two, and the things that are about to be after these, point three. The things thou hast seen, that's chapter one, the description of the vision, the experience with the Lord, the introduction here. The things that are, chapters two and three, existing conditions in existing [00:18:07] assemblies at that time, but those existing conditions in seven existing assemblies, representative assemblies really, they also give us a prophetic picture of the whole dispensation of grace that we live in, and there are things written to each of the assemblies that are applicable in each of the others, because each time at the close of the letter, we have the words, he that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies, not to your assembly, and you know to me that those were, that verse seven times repeated, is one of the most powerful verses against the thought of an assembly being independent of another assembly, of other assemblies. The thought of independent [00:19:06] assemblies is not countenanced here in the Revelation. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies, you're one of many. Well, this is chapter one here, a little bit. I fell at his feet as dead, just from the human standpoint. John fell at the feet of the Lord as dead, and you know, if you're lying at my feet as dead, if I want to put my right hand on you, either you're going to have to rise, or I'm going to have to stoop, and we see the tender grace of the Lord Jesus to his own. The presentation in a public way, the Lord is seen in all his dignity, but on the other hand, we see these glimpses just like the majesty of the Lord, and shines out here [00:20:04] and there in the Gospels, you know, when the Lord can stand up in the boat and say, down boy, to the waves and to the wind, or on the mountain of transfiguration, you know, for an instant, his glory shines out, and here in the Revelation, every once in a while, there's an instant where his tenderness, his care for his own, shines through. The picture is just reversed, but you know, he says, John, I've got something for you to do. The Roman Emperor may think that you're useless now, you've been put aside, you're in a position where you can do nothing for me and for my people. He says, you've got a pen, I want you to write, I want you to write, and he tells him exactly what to write, and he starts to explain what he's already seen here to him. We read that 20th verse, and then the Lord [00:21:03] dictates seven brief letters to these seven representative assemblies in the Roman province of Asia, and I understand if you go from one to the other in the order that we have them here in chapter two and three, you're really kind of going in a circle. And each letter, the Lord presents himself in that character that corresponds to the need of that assembly, and eventually of that period of time in church history. And the Lord commends what he can commend, and isn't it nice, the attitude of the Lord. First of all, presents himself, which was the way a letter was written in those days. You know, you speak who you are, who you're addressing, and then the Lord immediately commends anything good that he can commend. He can't all commend in every case, but anything good [00:22:11] that he can commend. Then he takes up any problem that he sees that needs to be addressed. And you know, if we would work in that order, we would be much more successful in helping with problems. But so often we jump into the problem, we've long lost sight of anything good in our brother or sister, and we're just concerned about their problem areas. And then the Lord, in several of the first ones, appeals to all, he that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. And then he addresses himself to the overcomer, the one who by his grace

will seek to rise above these conditions. In the last, he reverses that and addresses the overcomer first, and then says to [00:23:04] the overcomer, he that has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. Things in a general way are too far gone to address the whole group. We could go into a lot of detail on these chapters, but books have been written on them, and I'll let you study them out more for yourself. The third part of the book begins very definitely in chapter 4, verse 1, where we read, After these things I saw, and behold, a door opened in heaven, and the first voice which I heard as of a trumpet speaking with me, saying, Come up here, and I will show thee the things which must take place after these things. That couldn't be any plainer, and John being told to come up hither, you know, maybe a veiled reference to the rapture. The rapture is [00:24:03] not before us as such in this book, but John is told, Come up here, and I'm going to give you a, what shall we say, ringside seat, balcony seat, box seat, you know, so that you have a good view of what's going to happen after these things, after the church dispensation comes to its close, is what is really meant here in being a prophetic book. And this goes on. You come to a conclusion of the book in terms of a rapid chronological survey of things that are going to happen. You come to a conclusion of the book at the end of chapter 11, and we'll just turn there for a moment. The seventh angel sounds his trumpet in verse 15, and there was, there were great voices in [00:25:08] the heavens saying, The kingdom of the world of our Lord and of his Christ is come, and he shall reign to the ages of ages. And the 24 elders who sit on their thrones before God fell upon their faces and worshiped God, saying, We give thee thanks, Lord God Almighty, he who is and who was, that thou has taken thy great power and has reigned, and the nations have been full of wrath, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead to be judged, and to give recompense to thy servants, the prophets, and to the saints, and to those who fear thy name, small and great, and to destroy those that destroy the earth. And the temple of God in the heavens was opened, and so on. But really, with the Lord setting up his kingdom, and so this, in a sense, is the conclusion. So when [00:26:06] I read the rest of the book, there are a series of flashbacks. I call them flashback close-ups. You know, we've seen films of athletic events, and here's this football game going on, and 22 men running around knocking each other over and things like that, throwing a little ball around. And you know, this counts for a whole lot. They're being paid a lot of money, and so on. And so certain things that they do are much more important than some of the other running around. And what the man who has the ball does with it is what really counts. And so when there's a crucial play, you know, they replay it in slow motion. And then you see the arm going back to throw the pass. You know, that's not how the man did it. But you see the details. You know, you see the details. That is [00:27:02] how he did it, but he didn't do it that slowly. And you know, the most crucial things you want to see the details of. And that's what we have really basically in the second half of the Revelation. Now, there are a number of things that are looked at for themselves in detail. Some of them are not mentioned in the first part, but the idea of the Revelation is to present the Lord Jesus as the final victor. And in that sense, it ends there at the end of chapter 11. And all the rest is still further detail. Now, chapter 21, 1 to 8, for example, gives us a picture of the eternal state. Almost the only picture that we have of the Revelation, of what eternity is going to be like. Well, it's very important, very beautiful. But, you know, even before that, the Lord will have taken his rightful place. So here's one added detail that God can give us. We have the great [00:28:07] harlot, the contrast to the Bride of the Lamb. The city, Rome, called Babylon symbolically here, confusion, contrasted with that glorious city that comes down from heaven, from God, the new Jerusalem. We have both the false pretender and the true, pictured as a city and as a bride. And, you know, we have the details of the judgments of God. There are providential judgments, and there are very direct judgments. Many times we read of a fourth of the earth or a third of the earth, and that part of the then known world that was exposed to the truth of God very directly [00:29:05] will come under the greatest judgment, too. You know, we're judged in proportion to the light that we've received and that we've rejected. Well, these are some little details. The revelation seems so different from the rest

of John's writings, but it has a different purpose. It's to give us one more view of the Lord Jesus, the view that we're waiting for. And, you know, this scene in Revelation 5, the picture of heaven, very particularly during the tribulation time or at the beginning of the tribulation time, Revelation 4 and 5, I don't think that that's necessarily the eternal picture, but it's a beautiful picture. The throne of God [00:30:04] is in the center. I think of Bush Stadium in St. Louis. And, you know, the playing field is in the center, and all the seats are arranged in a circle around it. No matter where you sit, you have to look forward. And in heaven, the description we have in Revelation 4 and 5 is the same way. And who has the box seats, the best seats? Well, you have the four living creatures, of course, representative of God's attributes and judgment and government of the world, but then you have 24 thrones and 24 elders seated on them, dressed as priests, crowned. Crowns are thrown down, cast down at the feet of the Lord. Thou art worthy, you know, but these 24 elders represent the saints of God in glory. And, you know, we're closest to the Lord. And it's one of these elders [00:31:07] who later on continues the tour that John is getting of heaven and future events and so on. He is able to explain. He's able to explain in chapter 5 when, you know, why this weeping and so on. Well, the elder can explain. We will have an understanding when we're in the glory with the Lord. And an understanding, you know, sometimes we couldn't explain certain chapters of certain verses here, but then we'll be able to. And who is the center? First you see the throne, one seated on the throne, and then one that is viewed in a double character of the lion of the tribe of Judah, the conquering lion, but he's seen as a lamb freshly slain. The Lord Jesus is there. In the center of the throne, the center of God's throne, and he's to take his place here on the [00:32:06] earth. This book sealed with seven seals, I believe it's the book that really, shall we say, the title deed to the world. Title deed to the world and all that it has. Well, in order for the Lord to take over this world, he's got to cleanse it. He's got to execute judgment, and he's the only one worthy to do so. And then we see him beginning to do so. The first judgments are the sealed judgments, and they seem to be very providential. The final judgments later on are very directly from God, and there are an awful lot of details in between, both in the chronological sequence and in the series of flashbacks later on. That series is mostly in chronological order, but not altogether.

[00:33:03] For example, after the eternal state is depicted to us in chapter 21, we go back and look at the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven and so on. We go back into a picture that brings the millennium before us. And in our present condition of body and of understanding our limitations, how can we really appreciate anything beyond the earth being reconstituted and things being made wonderful, the environment being cleaned up, justice coming in, the Lord ruling in righteousness, putting down evil, dealing with it? As far as the eternal state, when the tabernacle of God will be with men, God will dwell among them, be their God, they will be his people. These things are told us, but we're not given description in detail [00:34:05] of things that we're just not capable yet of entering into. Well, there's a special blessing attached to the study of this book. It's the only book that presents us with details as to the assembly's future. I say details. We're told to depart and to be with Christ is far better, and we know that our future is with the Lord, but here we're given some details. And just as the bride of a king, well, she'll be pleased to see every honor that is brought to her husband. She'll be pleased to see him conquering his enemies, putting down evil and so on, and she rules with him. She's at his side. We will be at the side of the Lord Jesus. We will be following him. We read of the marriage of the lamb in chapter 19 and so on. We have an interest [00:35:07] in these things, much of what goes on in the tribulation time, and we're in the glory. What's going on is here on the earth, the remnant of Israel, those whom they reach from among the Gentiles, people that are being brought to the Lord, but it's his interests, and that's why we're interested in it. It's not directly our future, but it's his future, and we love him.

We appreciate him. We have this wonderful relationship with him, and we're very interested in what will happen. We're not just going to be, if I can use the term, maybe it's a bad term to use, intoxicated with our delight in him, in heaven, so that we would be oblivious to anything else. No, we will be there intelligently entering into all that concerns his interests. There are [00:36:03] more glimpses of heaven in this book than in any other, and yet it's a book essentially of judgment. Majestic ascriptions of worship, the verses I read out of chapter 11 before are part of Handel's Messiah too, you know, and the focus is on the area that John was acquainted with, the area that had the gospel presented to it.

The Lord's nearness is coming, his reign, that's emphasized. There are appeals to assemblies, actually to individuals in the assemblies too, to heed the Lord's evaluation. Art brought this before us. We're not told things in scripture just to have our heads filled with knowledge, just to have an intelligent understanding. No, there's to be an application, and [00:37:04] it's a wonderful book. It was a powerful stroke against the greatness of Rome. There's one who's far greater, and the book ends on a very beautiful, very tender note. John has been shown all these things, and then repeatedly in the last chapter, he's told by the Lord Jesus, behold, I come quickly, and the virtually final words, verse 20, he that testifies these things says, yea, I come quickly, and there's a response. Even so, or amen, come, Lord Jesus.

You know, if we can read the revelation without responding in this way, amen, let it be so.

[00:38:06] Come, Lord Jesus. If we can read it without that, we've missed the point of the book. Lord Jesus, we thank thee that thou, the one who was rejected, who was crucified, whom men thought they had done away with, that God has raised thee from among the dead. We've seen this. God has exalted thee to his own right hand, said, sit down at my right hand until I make thy foes the footstool of thy feet. And we thank thee for this book of revelation that shows that God will do this, that thou wilt rule, thou wilt come back, thou wilt judge, thou wilt deal in righteousness, thou wilt take thy rightful place. Lord Jesus, we thank thee for the assurance in thy word [00:39:05] that we will be with thee and that we will see these things come to pass. And Lord Jesus, we thank thee that thou art coming for us personally, even before. And we appreciate thy promise that thou art coming quickly. Not only that thou art coming quickly in relation to the earth as such, but also for us. And we simply answer, amen. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.