

Exposition of Revelation 1

Part 1

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[00:00:00] Beloved Brethren, I'd like to have us turn to the first section of the book of the Revelation.

Revelation chapter 1. I'm going to read the chapter, although I only purpose to speak on part of it. Let me say, to begin with, I don't like the title in the authorized version, because I believe the title is given in verse 1, the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must [00:01:01] shortly come to pass. He sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John, who bear record of the Word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ and of all things that he saw. Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein, for the time is at hand. John, to the seven churches which are in Asia, grace be unto you and peace from him which is, and which was, and which is to come, and from the seven spirits which are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in [00:02:03] his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him. And all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, amen. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending saith the Lord which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty. I, John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet, [00:03:03] saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, and what thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia, unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks, and in the midst of the seven candlesticks, one like unto the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and gird about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were as a flame of fire, and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace, and his voice as the [00:04:01] sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars, and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not, I am the first and the last. I am he that liveth and was dead. And behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And have the keys of hell and of death. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter. The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks, the seven stars, are the angels of the seven churches, and

the [00:05:01] seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches. Verse 19 is the outline of the book, as we know well. The things which thou hast seen are those things that we just read about in chapter one. The things which are are those things that have to do with our present dispensation in chapters two and three. And the things which shall be hereafter commence in chapter four, and I believe that's already been before us earlier in this conference. Now, more than 40 years ago, when I first went to Jamaica, I had the privilege of staying with Grant and Barbara Steigl and family part of the time, with Bill and Frannie [00:06:04] Pulasic part of the time, each of them with family, and the children were young.

I can remember one morning at Bill Pulasic's home, he was reading from the Revelation. I forget if it was chapter eight or chapter nine. Anyway, the chapters are not short, not long in this book, and the children were all at the table. He read the chapter, and his oldest son Mark, who was probably nine or ten at the time, said, Daddy, read some more. I like Revelation. It's all about dragons and monsters. Well, there are those who like Revelation because it's all about dragons and monsters, but really that's not what the Revelation is [00:07:02] about. Now, we've considered a chapter in two readings that brings before us a dragon and brings before us horrible monsters, and we've had much food for thought as we've looked at those chapters. I think it's good to be reminded that this is the revelation of Jesus Christ. What we have considered is part of part three of the Revelation. The longer part, it takes place over a period of seven years in large part, and then we have even the eternal state brought before us in chapter 21. The testimony of Jesus, the spirit of prophecy, is the [00:08:04] testimony of Jesus, and it's good to be reminded that this book is the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him. And as interesting and as worthwhile as our studies looking at some of the details in this book and details in Second Thessalonians as to future events, as to persons who will come on the scene and their foul intentions, well, it's good that we're reminded that God's purpose in giving us the Revelation is that it be the revelation of Jesus Christ. If we would not have this book, our picture of the Lord Jesus would be incomplete and, I believe, inadequate. You know, there is a [00:09:09] prayer that has been taught to children that begins, gentle Jesus, meek and mild, and so on. We see the Lord Jesus meek and mild in the Gospels. We occasionally see a flash of his greatness in the Gospels. He can get up in a boat on a raging sea, stand there, and rebuke the wind and the waves as though they were puppies. Get down, get down, you know. We see the Lord Jesus very beautifully presented to us in the Gospels, but the revelation that we are [00:10:02] given in the Gospels is not complete. The Gospels end with the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and, some of them, his ascension. But the Revelation takes us farther, and, you know, if we only had the Gospels, we would feel that, well, the Lord Jesus lost the battle. He was crucified. We would recognize God raised him from the dead. God accepted him, but that which our brother Arthur brought before us last night out of the Second Psalm, we wouldn't have that. We wouldn't have any indication that this would come [00:11:01] to pass. In the Revelation, we see that the story ends right, and I'm so glad for it. When I was a boy, I loved to read, still do for that matter, and I would go to the school library and take one book after another off the shelves, and usually I would open them to the middle or somewhere near the end, and if I liked the way the book came out, I was apt to check it out and take it home with me. I like the way this book comes out. I appreciate the fact that the Lord Jesus is the victorious one and that God shows us that that which he has done was not a matter of a losing battle or a defeat or anything of that matter. It is a victory that he has gained, and we find here that this is the revelation of [00:12:05] Jesus Christ which God gave to him to show to his bondman what must shortly take place. Now, this was written more than 1,900 years ago, and if it was written about things that must shortly take place, then certainly the time is much shorter today. But these are things that, it doesn't say might shortly take place, but must shortly take place. These are purposes and counsels of God. These are things that must shortly take place, and they're given

to bondmen, to servants of the Lord Jesus. As I look around, I believe that we are all, I don't know [00:13:05] everyone, but I would, I would think we are all servants of his. Unsaved people complain about the revelation, that it's confusing, that they can't understand it, and so on. It's not written for them. It's not given to them. They will not understand it. They're not servants of the Lord Jesus, and we can't expect them to understand it. God has given it to the Lord Jesus to show his bondman what must shortly take place. I appreciated when I was a young brother, and the assembly at Taylorsville, where I was at the time, was still very new. We had a [00:14:01] series of meetings once. We'd invited our brother Ray Campbell to have a series of meetings on the chart from eternity to eternity. It was a two-week series of meetings. At the end of that series, a young brother, not in fellowship with us, but interested in the Word, interested in the meetings, he was enthusiastic, and he went to brother Ray Campbell and said to him, you've got to come back in about four months and give us a series on revelation. I've so enjoyed this series, and brother Campbell wisely said, I'm not going to do that. He said, if you really want to understand the revelation, you've got to have some understanding of the 65 books that precede it, because so much of the revelation is written in symbols. We have this here. He signified it by his angel. He gave it in symbols, [00:15:06] by his angel, and many of these symbols are in Daniel, in Ezekiel, in other prophetic books in the Old Testament, and not, by no means confined to the Old Testament. When we get a new symbol in the revelation that we don't have in prior books, it's explained on the spot. One example is right at the end of this first chapter, where we read the mystery of the seven stars, which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches. Well, we know from other scripture that the church is not mentioned directly in the Old Testament. If we wouldn't have New Testament teaching on the church, and we wouldn't understand the beautiful types that we [00:16:06] have of the church, starting with Eve and, you know, Zipporah, Rebecca, and others, we wouldn't understand these to be types of the church, if we didn't have their antitype. So, all right, angels of the seven churches, and seven candlesticks, better translated lampstands, which thou sawest are the seven churches. And so, when we go through the revelation, we find that when symbols are used that are not repeated from the Old Testament, or earlier in the New Testament, and they are explained on the spot. The Apostle John tells us the circumstances under which this book was written, under which this revelation was entrusted to him to [00:17:03] be passed on to the seven assemblies that are mentioned, and we realize from the rest of scripture, seven, lots of sevens in the revelation, seven is a complete number. And we know it breaks down, generally speaking, into three and four, or four and three. Now, there are so many things that, you know, we know some of these facts. Well, John is told to write this to these assemblies, and in chapters two and three, there is a special message for these assemblies, a message that certainly was appropriate for each of these assemblies individually at the time of the writing of the book, messages that are for us all, because we're all he that has an ear is to hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies, not just to his assembly. But we know that being in this [00:18:08] prophetic book, they set before us a prophetic picture of the course of events from the beginning of church history, back in the Acts, to the Rapture, and we generally study it from this aspect. There are things that we can personally learn from each of the letters, but it's that God would give us a prophetic picture, really, and it all fits as part of the revelation of Jesus Christ, told it in signs. Why? Well, God, in his wisdom, has his reasons. We don't always know God's reasons, but when we see the explanation that John gives as [00:19:05] to how this book came about to be written, he himself was on the island of Patmos. He says, I, John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the island that is called Patmos for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. As we go through the Acts, and particularly when we follow the travels of the Apostle Paul, we find that he ran into difficulty, primarily, from Judaizing teachers who were trying to corrupt the gospel of the Lord Jesus, and sometimes, they could get the authorities of a given

place to work [00:20:02] with them. For example, at Philippi, Paul and Silas were beaten with many stripes. They were locked up in the prison, their feet made fast in the stocks, but it was a local thing. At the time that John is writing, the persecutions of Christians from the Roman government, the imperial Roman government, had commenced, had been going for a while, and John, the last of the Apostles, evidently in his old age, had been taken and had been exiled onto this dry, rocky island, which I believe is some 20 miles off the coast of Turkey, a little bit too far for him to swim to shore. He was put there to suffer. We don't find that he had fellowship. He was, [00:21:08] I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. That couldn't be taken away from him. There were not, apparently not others with whom he was able to meet. You know, the Apostle Paul so often had a captive audience. He was chained to a soldier, and doubtless they had to take turns being chained to him. I can't see Paul chained to a soldier for 6 or 8 or 10 or 12 hours at a time without getting into some conversation with him and presenting that one who was so precious to his heart, the Lord Jesus. And when Paul writes to the Philippians, he includes greetings from the household of Caesar. I understand the household of Caesar was a technical [00:22:01] term among the Romans which really referred to the Praetorian Guard. The Praetorian Guard was the emperor's elite bodyguard. The Praetorian Guard functioned as a police force in Rome, and the Praetorian Guard was in charge of the prisoners that were remanded to Rome in those days because they had appealed to the emperor. And he can give special greetings from those of the household of Caesar. A number of these Praetorian Guards, hard men, naturally speaking, had been saved. My conjecture is that John hadn't been on the island of Patmos very long. Otherwise, perhaps others would have been one to the Lord. But, you know, even if he couldn't fellowship with other believers, it didn't take away the Lord's interest in him, nor his interest in the [00:23:01] Lord. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. And then he hears this voice behind him, and the Lord himself speaks to him. Now, if we think that John was there for the testimony of Jesus Christ, for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, no doubt the authorities were trying to put him in a place where he would be useless, where he would not be able to further the cause of Christ. And here in this very place, the Lord Jesus appears to him and gives him this tremendous revelation that he is indeed the victor. And it's not only that he's won the victory over Satan at the cross, but the final victory will be his.

All has been secured through the work at Calvary. And, you know, the Lord says to [00:24:08] John here in this chapter, fear not, fear not. And why would he give the book in symbolic language? Perhaps one reason is that this book speaks of the downfall of Rome, of the Roman Empire. We've seen in chapter 13 these beasts, and the first beast we've concluded is really the revived Roman Empire. Well, we didn't take other chapters that deal with that, but that falls. And we might say this was a very revolutionary book for its day. And if God had given it in the very plain language that we have in the Gospels and elsewhere in Scripture, and a copy of that [00:25:05] would have fallen into the hands of the imperial police, it might have caused a lot of additional problems for the believers in that day. So God gives that book in symbolic language, using symbols that believers would know and understand from other portions of God's Word. God, in his wisdom, God knows how much we are able to take, and he, in his wisdom, he doesn't give us the amount of persecution that some of our brethren in countries like China and India, some of these places, what they go through, most of us have never faced that. And God knows. He says [00:26:02] there hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man. But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted. Above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. I have heard of an elderly sister in our country who was going through great trial, and was reminded of the verse I just quoted. And she said, well, I wish he didn't have such a high opinion of me. We may wish that sometimes too, but God knows what we are able to take. And here he, this book is signified by his angel.

You know much of the book, starting in chapter 4, is almost a guided tour of the future, especially viewed from the standpoint of heaven. And there is an [00:27:01] angel guide for the Apostle John. He signified it by his angel unto his servant John, who bear record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. Again, the Lord Jesus is absolutely prominent in this chapter. And in this book, blessed is he that readeth. And I understand that word readeth is especially the word for public reading. Timothy was told to pay attention to reading. Back in those days, literacy was not as high as it is today in our countries, and so scripture had to be read aloud. And blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy. There would be those who would come together to hear this [00:28:06] prophecy being read, and other portions of scripture being read. And I've been amazed myself when I've had contact with people who haven't had the benefit of education, how much more they tend to retain from hearing it than I do when I hear something. I mean, I read something, I can retain a little bit more of what I see in print when I simply hear it. Unfortunately, it goes in one ear, and a fair amount of it escapes. But here, blessed is he that readeth, and they that words of this prophecy, and. And it's not that we're to stop with hearing and reading, and keep those things which are written therein. There are things in this book that we are to keep. We're all aware that in chapter 2 and 3, he that has an [00:29:09] ear is told to hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. But there are many things in the rest of the book, too, that are for us. And I'm glad I came over the Atlantic, and have been privileged to sit in on the readings here. Your brethren use a very fine scalpel sometimes to dissect these scriptures, but, you know, I don't want to say that in a critical way. If there were many children at the Bible readings, I suppose they would have to be on a little simpler level. But it's good to go into these things, and to understand what God is saying to us. The time is at hand. And this is something that is emphasized in this book. The time is at hand. We find it in the beginning, we find it in [00:30:07] the end. We don't have time to waste. John wishes grace and peace to the seven churches in Asia. And he says, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Lord Jesus. He doesn't say from Jesus, or the Lord Jesus Christ. He brings an expression in that sets him somewhat at a distance. And when we read the description of the Lord Jesus as he appeared to John that Lord's Day on the island of Patmos, it was not the way John was accustomed to seeing the Lord Jesus. John was the one who had leaned on the bosom and leaned on the breast of [00:31:05] the Lord Jesus. It's usually concluded that John was the youngest of the disciples at the time the Lord called his disciples, that he may have been only 18 or 20 years old at the time, but that's immaterial. John had been very close to the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus had taken him and James and Peter along on several occasions when he left the others behind. And yet John introduces the Lord Jesus here in his majesty, in his dignity. The one who is, who was, and who is to come. And we speak of the eternal sonship, yes. His eternal person, his eternal existence.

And he is eternally the Son, although that is stated very definitely in other [00:32:05] portions. His eternal existence, he is, he was, he is to come, is set before us. The seven spirits which are before his throne, the fullness of the Spirit of God. And, well, excuse me, the one who is and who was and who is to come is God the Father here. And then we have Jesus Christ in verse 5. But the Lord Jesus is certainly also the eternal one from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness.

No doubt John had been on trial, was condemned to this island. No doubt other Christians had suffered much. Jesus Christ is the faithful witness, regardless [00:33:01] of any failures on our part. And he's the model for us in that too. The faithful witness, the first begotten of the dead.

And some of these expressions are elaborated on in other places. And the prince of the kings of the earth. He's the first who rose from the dead on his own or simply raising him from the dead. There

were others who were raised, whether by prophets in the Old Testament or by the Lord Jesus when he was here on earth. But he's the first begotten of the dead. He is the one to whom all dignity is ascribed. And the prince of the kings of the earth. I've appreciated that expression. That expression put him in direct opposition or contrast to the [00:34:05] Roman emperor at that time. You'll remember when Julius Caesar was assassinated, it was because his friends and followers thought that he was going to make himself king. And the Romans had thrown out their king several hundred years prior to that and hated the word king. His nephew, Augustus Caesar, was wise enough not to take the title king to himself. And yet he was over many kings, Herod, Herod's sons, and those in other places too. And these petty kings had to go to Rome to have their title confirmed when their predecessor died. Because the Roman Emperor was the prince of the kings of the earth. And that word in [00:35:03] Latin, I believe, is princeps. Prince with the PS on the end, which really means first head. First head over all the kings of the earth. And, you know, to write a book like this would be quite revolutionary. To write about one who is the prince of the kings of the earth. Remember in Thessalonica, Paul and Silas had been accused of preaching one Jesus, another king, one Jesus, another king.

Well, here John gives, by inspiration, gives the Lord Jesus that title, the first head over all the kings of the earth. And as John is writing, as he speaks about the Lord Jesus, you can just picture him, an old man, penning this epistle. He doesn't have a secretary with him on the island. Paul usually had to [00:36:04] use a secretary. But as John writes about our blessed Lord, he breaks out into this doxology of praise. Unto him that loved us, more accurately translated, to him who loves us. His love is not simply a matter of the past. It continues through the present. To him who loves us and has washed us from our sins in his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father. This is going to cause difficulty in an empire where everything has to be approved by the Emperor. He has made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, and that throws us into conflict with religious authorities too.

[00:37:07] We don't need human ordination to priesthood, do we? He has made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father. To him be the glory and the might to the ages of ages. Amen. John just overflows with the praise of the Lord Jesus.

As one goes through the book, one finds at various places the record of the praise in heaven to the Lord Jesus. Whether it's the elders giving him praise, or later on, it seems all heaven bursts forth in his praise. As it becomes demonstrated that he is victorious over all here on earth, and [00:38:04] that all will be subject to him, and that all evil will be put down, will be judged, will be dealt with, again and again there's an overflowing of praise to the Lord Jesus. You know this should be the result of our studies here too, when we see that he deals with these wicked ones, and that their power is destroyed, or are not. His power remains, and we have every reason to praise him. Then John says, behold he comes, and here it's very definitely what we termed the appearing. It's not the reference to the rapture, because he comes with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they which have pierced him. And all the [00:39:02] tribes of the land, or the earth, shall wail because of him. Yea, amen. Then John goes into detail as to who the Lord is. I am, the Lord Jesus really speaks, I am the Alpha, the beginning, and the Omega, said the Lord God, he who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty. And in this book again we see John speaks of the background, and just note a little bit, I'm taking far too much time I'm afraid, when he hears that great voice as of a trumpet, saying what thou seest right in a book, and sent it to the seven [00:40:02] assemblies. John may have been a bit discouraged, being banished to this island, apparently being there alone, what can I do for the Lord? The Lord says you can write for me. You know, there are very few of us that get to the point where we can do absolutely nothing for the Lord anymore. There are believers whose last days or last hours are spent in a coma, but most of us can still do something for the Lord. And sometimes

as we get older we feel, well I can't do this, can't do that anymore, I've got to lay this aside, I've got to lay that aside. It's perfectly normal, but the Lord has something for us. I doubt that he'll have us write a revelation, but there are other ways in which we can serve him and [00:41:05] encourage our fellow saints. John says I turned back to see the voice which spoke with me, and he gives this description of the Lord Jesus in his judicial majesty. Turn back to see the voice. I'm not going to go into that, but in verse 17, when I saw him I fell at his feet as dead. One who loved the Lord Jesus, who had been so close to him, who was suffering for his sake, yet to see the Lord Jesus in his judicial majesty was so impressive, I fell at his feet as dead. But then what do we read? He laid his right hand upon me. You know, in this book we don't find a lot of the tenderness of the Lord Jesus, and yet he is this same Jesus, isn't he? He laid [00:42:03] his right hand upon me. You know, if I want to lay my right hand on someone lying at my feet here, I have to bend down. And we see the Lord Jesus, in his great grace, bending down to lay his right hand on John who is at his feet. And he says, fear not.

I am 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. Regardless of what you have been made to suffer, regardless of the power of Rome, the emperor and all [00:43:15] his cohorts, he says, I am the first and the last and the living one. I became dead. Behold, I am living to the ages of ages. They can't destroy me. I have the keys of death and of Hades. And then he's given the commission to write. And we said, verse 19 is the outline of the book. Write what thou hast seen and the things that are, and the things that are about to be after these. And already he's given a little explanation of things that [00:44:01] he has seen because he saw seven golden lamps or candlesticks, lamps is better. And in the midst of the seven lamps, one like the son of man. So perhaps someone else wants to go on with the subject or I'm sure the Lord has more for us this evening. Whatever it is that he has for us, may God bless his word to our hearts.